

NED BUNTLINE'S GREAT STORY OF BUFFALO BILL.

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No. 128.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers.

NEW YORK.

31 Rose St., N. Y. P.O. Box 2734.

10 Cents

BUFFALO BILL'S LAST VICTORY; Or, Dove Eye, the Lodge Queen.

E. W. David By NED BUNTLINE.

Sep. 3 - 1891.



BUFFALO BILL AND HIS CELEBRATED HORSE POWDER-FACE

BUFFALO BILL'S LAST VICTORY,

OR,

Dove Eye, The Lodge Queen.

By NED BUNTLIN.

CHAPTER I.

TEXAS JACK STRIKES A TRAIL.

"Captain Cody, you will take an escort, a wagon-train of provisions, and forty horses, which the corral-master will deliver to you, and proceed with them to the camp of Spotted Tail, where you will deliver them, saying that these presents are from the Great Father at Washington to the chief, to show him that we are his friends, and to help him to go to the reservation set apart for him and his people. Impress on his mind that he must keep his young braves on the reservation, and that we, the soldiers of the Great Father at Washington, will see that no settlers shall occupy his lands, that no hunters shall disturb his game, and that no hostile tribes shall break the peace we declare. If bad men, white or red, go upon his territory, to make war, or deprive him of his rights, we will follow and punish them. These, sir, are your verbal orders—you will find them laid down fully in this special written order from headquarters."

These words, spoken to the People's Hero, and our dear friend, "Buffalo Bill," by the gallant officer in command of the department near his prairie home, were listened to by the chief of scouts, quietly and attentively, then, with a smile, he said:

"I'll be in the saddle in an hour, sir. But, if you please, hear a word, or maybe a dozen, about these reds. Old Spotted Tail is all right. He gave me his word when I did him the greatest favor of his life—saving his daughter from the hands of Yellow Bear and putting the scalp of that chief in his belt. But Spotted Tail is old—he'll not live long, and there are sub-chiefs in his band who'll not keep his treaties. The reds are all treacherous—they don't tame worth a snap, and the day will come when they've got to be wiped out."

"It may be so," said the officer. "But we have orders to obey, and have no responsibility beyond that. Those who order are responsible, and must take consequences. I should have told you that one wagon is full of extra presents, blankets, and other things, to put the chief and his band in good humor."

"All right, colonel; but I hope there is no whisky sent. I'm down on that great curse of humanity, and don't want it to go where I am. When I went East I saw enough of the harm it did to sicken me forever of it and its uses as well as its abuses. I saw men of wealth, education, and high standing, forget, under its influences, their dignity, their self-respect—almost their manhood. I saw men of talent, under its influences, become weak as idiots. I saw strong men and brave, quivering in mental and bodily weakness, while they were sick from its enervating influences. And seeing this—knowing it to be a man's worst enemy, because it is insidious and tempting, I made up my mind to turn my back on it forever."

"Captain Cody, you never formed a better resolution, and I honor you for it the more because a man with so many friends is often and sorely tempted. But I know full well how firm you are in all you undertake. But I detain you from duty. Good-morning, and a pleasant trip."

"Thank you, colonel. May I ask a favor? I would like to take Texas Jack and my band of private hunters with me, for when we return we can bring in a lot of game for the post and my own use. I also have some heads to send to my friend, Professor Ward, which I'd like to get."

"Certainly, Captain Cody, and take your own time in returning after you have delivered the horses and pro-

visions to Spotted Tail. In fact, I'd rather than not you'd scout over a large range of country, so as to know it better if we have, as I fear we will, yet to face a general Indian war. I have as little faith in the Indians as you have. You know when you will be wanted for the Yellowstone expedition—the time between now and then is your own."

"I thank you, colonel. I'll not abuse the liberty."

The brave scout saluted and turned away, for he had now his ever saddest duty to do—to go and say "good by" to his dear ones at home—to that household which made the sunshine for his brave, true heart.

An hour later he was in the saddle, with a spare horse, trained to follow where he rode, and with stout-hearted Texas Jack, and his band of hardy hunters, following in his trail.

Buffalo Bill, as ever, well mounted, was now better armed than usual. He carried that long range rifle—a gift from the author of this story—across his saddle front, while at the rear hung the repeating rifle given him by the Union Club, while in his belt he wore the silver-mounted pistols given him by James Gordon Bennet, Jr., and the keen bladed knife which went with his long-range rifle.

He joined the cavalry escort which waited the wagon-train near the gates of the fort, and with the gang of horses from the corral, moved off at a rapid gait for the camp of the chief of the Big Horn Sioux.

"Rather a late start, but we'll reach water on Elmo Creek, and camp there to-night," said Buffalo Bill, as he led the column with Texas Jack by his side.

"We'd do it easy," said Texas Jack, who, as a hunter-rider, and lasso-man, was admitted to have no superior anywhere—"we'd do it easy if 'twasn't for the wagons. Government mules, like government soldiers, like to take things easy, 'specially on a long march. When I lived in Texas we rangers would make a hundred miles and camp 'twixt sun and sun, with led horses for a change. I reckon when Uncle Sam's men do that they'll do it by railroad."

They had stopped an hour to feed and rest by some "buffalo wallows," where the animals could water, and were in sight of the willows on the creek which Buffalo Bill had named after his beautiful boy—Elmo Judson Cody—when Texas Jack, who was riding apart on a ridge to the left, was seen to dismount and bend to the ground, then walk on, leading his horse, and still examining the ground.

"Texas Jack is on a trail," said Buffalo Bill. "He beats any hound that ever nosed a deer in finding trails. He was born to it."

Jack was now seen to mount and ride rapidly in toward the head of the column.

"What have you seen, Jack?" asked Buffalo Bill, as the hunter joined him.

"Tracks—like them a war party makes. No spreadin' or scatterin', but all in a line, makin' a deep trail, as if there was a crowd of 'em—headin' about as we are."

"Then we may find who and what they are when we camp," said Bill. "Take a half dozen of the boys and spread a mile or so, and keep a couple of long rifle shots ahead, so we don't get ambushed from any of the ridges."

Texas Jack picked his men and galloped on—the men spreading right and left to cover a wide sweep in advance, while Buffalo Bill rode over to the trail to examine it for himself.

When he came back he merely said:

"It looks, as Jack said, like a war party trail, but it is at least a day old. They'll not be in our way, without they've heard of this trip and are waitin' for us somewhere, and that isn't likely. They wouldn't leave a trail this far back, runnin' in that course we'd travel—not if they knew their business."

The column went on, reached a willow grove and water just at sunset, and camped without further incident.

CHAPTER II.

A JEALOUS WOMAN'S REVENGE.

The great chief, "Spotted Tail," stood in his lodge, his eyes bent down, gazing into the little fire of small sticks which burned in the center, fed now and then by Intowah—his youngest wife—upon whom Natolah, the elder, a

the mother of Dove Eye, looked with supreme contempt, for Intowee was still young and childless, and she was far prettier than the old wife. That alone was enough to make the elder hate the younger, for Spotted Tail had human weakness and an eye for beauty, old as he was.

Dove Eye herself, quiet and listless, lay back from all, on a large pile of soft furs, looking at a photographic picture of Buffalo Bill, which she had become possessed of at the time of the grand Alexis hunt, and which had been her solace ever since.

It was a quaint figure—the inside of that huge lodge or tent of buffalo skins, painted with all sorts of rude devices, and stretched over poles, which joined at the upper end in a peak; the old chief, sad and care-worn, standing over the fire, his handsome young squaw feeding the flame from a bundle of sticks which she had gathered, and looking up fondly at the chief, while the oldest squaw sat near by on the ground, gazing at her with a scowl of hate on her strongly marked face.

"Is Spotted Tail dreaming of promised presents which the pale-faces were to send him—the meat, and guns, and blankets, and the horses—which will never come," said Natolah, with a sneer.

"Let the 'Woman with a Tongue' keep still when the heart of the Great Chief is sad!" said Intowee, reproachfully.

"Be still you, before me—I am older and better than you," said the other, spitefully.

"Older and uglier, but no better," said Intowee, bitterly.

Like a mad tigress, Natolah sprang to her feet, seized the knife which was in the belt of Spotted Tail, and drove it to the hilt in the breast of Intowee.

A gasp—a shudder—a wailing cry, and the youngest wife of the chief lay dead before his face.

That face grew dark, very dark, with passion, but the chief had that wonderful control over all his feelings—passions, and pains, which seems inherent to the Indian character.

While Dove Eye arose, sprang forward, and looked with horror upon the dead, and Natolah herself seemed ashamed, as she yet held the knife, dripping crimson, in her hand, the chief stood proudly erect, with his arms folded over his breast, gazing at her.

For a minute or more he stood thus, his terrible eyes burning into her very heart, and then he spoke:

"Natolah has been the queen of my lodge these many grand suns. She is the mother of Dove Eye, the star of my spirit. But she has taken the work of the Great Spirit into her own hands. He is the Master of Life and the Giver of Death, and he has said, 'Who taketh life must lose life!' Natolah must die. Shall it be by the hand that killed Intowee, or shall the brother of Intowee, Red Bear, be called to revenge her death? I have spoken."

"This is my answer!" said Natolah, and, without a shudder, she plunged the reeking knife into her own heart.

Then, looking hate and scorn upon the dead body of her rival in his affections, Natolah turned her back toward Spotted Tail, drew her robe up about her face, and fell to the ground dead as her late rival and her victim.

Dove Eye screamed out, but a stern look and word of reproof came from the eyes and lips of her father.

"Be still," he said. "It has been the will of the Great Spirit that this should be. Not a bird flies, not a fish swims, or an antelope runs over the hills, but by His will. Be still."

Then he turned to a portion of the lodge where the late queen-wife kept her finery. From the top of her packs he took a beautiful coronet of colored feathers, with a golden crescent on the band directly over the part which rested on the forehead when it was worn.

This he placed on the head of his daughter, and he said: "As the Great Spirit hears me, from this time till I die—listen, Dove Eye, to my oath—no squaw but you shall enter my lodge. Now, Dove Eye is queen of my lodge."

And he placed the coronet on her head, and raising his eyes upward, said:

"Great Spirit, give her long life, and make her great among her people—wise in council, brave in all good work."

Dove Eye folded her arms upon her breast, and bowed her head to receive the blessing, and then went out of the lodge.

Spotted Tail went after her, and his signal-cry brought all his band to the front of his lodge.

Briefly he told his people what had happened within, and pointing to Dove Eye, said that no other squaw must ever enter his lodge or cook meat for him.

Then he bade Red Bear carry out the dead, to give them over to the women of the tribe for burial, so that his vow should not be broken, the vow that no woman but Dove Eye should enter his lodge.

Then when the dead were taken away he went back into his lodge and called Dove Eye in after him.

When she entered her father sat on the ground where Intowee died, and his blanket was over his face. He would not even let his child see that he grieved.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO STRANGERS.

It is unusual now, in this era of railroads, to see emigrant wagons far out on the plains—the pony express and the overland stage are things of the by-gone time, and are almost forgotten except by those who drove the one or rode the other, or the few who risked life and limb in the terrible journey.

But less than a half day's travel in advance of the column led by Buffalo Bill, and almost on the same route, there was a train of three wagons of this kind, heavy, covered wagons, drawn by teams of six mules to a wagon and guarded, or rather directed by a fine-looking old man, white-haired and venerable, but hale and hearty for his years, aided by two noble looking young men—one probably twenty-five or eight, and the other a couple of years younger.

The two leading wagons were driven by negroes, old men, whose very looks told that they had been slaves before slavery was abolished in our land—the last being in charge of one of those quaint looking Dutchmen who might live a life-time in America without losing their home-look and ways.

These were all the males in the party, but in the foremost wagon sat two very beautiful girls, one not more than fourteen or fifteen, the other probably two or three years older, whose looks told that they were sisters of the two young men and daughters of the old man—for all that similarity of feature which is known as family resemblance.

The young women were dressed in deep black, and this, with the absence of any other female, would lead one at a glance to infer that their mother was dead.

They had cozy seats, well lined with robes and blankets, under the canvas front of the great wagon, but when they chose to vary the mode of travel two pretty ponies, with side-saddles on their backs, were haltered to the rear of the wagons.

The father and sons, well-armed and mounted, with rifles, and with each a revolver in his belt, rode sometimes ahead, and then by the sides of the wagons, talking to the girls or cheering the drivers into a better gait with their teams.

The train belonged to Mr. Frank Herbeson, the old gentleman whose family were all with him, for his wife was dead—the negro drivers had been his slaves, and loved him too well to leave him, and he was now on his way from Eastern Missouri to Montana.

He was an old-fashioned man, disliking all new-fangled ideas, thus preferring the mode of travel we have described to any other, and so independent in his character so confident in the prowess of himself and his sons, and so confident in the report that there was no Indian war upon the plains, that he felt no fear in making the journey with no escort or guard but his own people.

The day was well advanced, and they had gone almost the length of their usual day's drive beyond their last camping ground without seeing a good place for their next camp.

The grass was yet very thin on the prairie, not having got its spring start owing to cold and backward weather, and the animals, on very short rations of grain, were not thriving as they ought to do.

even thus early on the route.

"Father, we had better camp without trying to reach timber at the first buffalo wallow we see with water enough in it for the stock," said Harry, the eldest son, as the old gentleman slackened his speed for the two young men to join him, just in front of the foremost wagon.

"Yes," said Marmion, the other son, "for the mules begin to lag terribly. Carl Whangheimer has got to swearing in high Dutch, and even that will not make his mules step a peg higher or a breath faster."

"Well, I don't know but 'twill be best," said the old gentleman. "There's little feed here, though. But we may get no better if we keep on till dark. Have you wood and water enough on hand to do our cooking with?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry; "I laid in a stock of both before we left camp this morning, for I didn't like the open looks of the country ahead before we started."

"All right, my boy; you were thoughtful. We will camp as soon as we find water for the beasts."

"Dere it is, ole massa—dere it is!" cried the driver of the first wagon, who from his perch above the mules saw a small pond known on the plains as a buffalo wallow, close to the right of his leading mules.

In an instant the wagons were driven up so as to form a kind of corral in a triangle, and then the drivers hurried to unharness their mules so as to let them feed on the scanty grass while they had light by which to see it.

The two sisters, lovely in face and form, began, as soon as their brother Harry built the fire, to cook supper, and by the time a fair-sized tent was erected they had tea made, some bacon broiled, and corn flap-jacks made.

It was a plain meal, but there was plenty of it, and the family seemed to enjoy it.

When they were through the drivers, who had in the meantime been busy with jack-screw and tar-pot greasing the wagon wheels, washed and came in for their share of the bacon and corn-pone.

While they were thus engaged the neigh of one of their horses, answered by another a little way off, caused all the party to look up quickly and see who or what was coming.

Two men, evidently white men, were seen riding leisurely along on the trail of the wagons, and coming directly toward the camp.

How long they had been on the trail none of the camp party could know without inquiry, and perhaps not then, for the looks of these strangers when they approached closely were not prepossessing. Even in a frontier town, where hard cases mostly congregate, these men would have been marked as fit to be "looked after" by the Vigilance Committee.

One was a large, very strongly built man, with long, grizzled beard and hair, eyes of dingy gray, that looked askant as if one was afraid to trust the other, and a generally repulsive looking face. He was fully fifty years of age, but in the prime of vigor and muscular strength.

The other was at least ten years younger, better looking, but his tangled hair and beard looked as if the use of comb, scissors, or razor was unknown to him. The color of these was fiery red, and his face had a sensual look.

Both men were dressed in buckskin coats and pants, beaded and fringed, Indian fashion, and wore pistols and a knife in their belts, and carried long-barreled rifles in their hands. They were mounted on small but tough and wiry mustangs, such as you find on the Texan borders—horses famed for endurance as well as speed.

"How d'ye, strangers?" said the foremost—for the two rode in Indian file in one trail—as he rode up in front of the tent where Mr. Herbeson and his sons and daughters stood. "You've a bad place for campin' if it comes on a storm, as it looks like. There's timber about ten miles ahead, where we're goin' to camp."

"Our animals were too tired to go farther," said Harry Herbeson, taking it on himself to reply, for his father was scanning the strangers closely. "We will do well enough here, I reckon."

"Yes," said the younger stranger, not looking at Harry while he spoke, but gazing at the girls with a bold stare—"yes, but mighty open if Indians were to swoop down on you."

"Indians!" said old Mr. Herbeson. "There are none who

"If that's all you know about 'em you're not very well informed," said the elder, in a sarcastic tone. "The Sioux just now pretend to be peaceable, but it's all pretense—they'll kill, steal and scalp when they can. Then there's rovin' gangs of Cherokees, Chickasaws, and even Creeks, that get away over here stealin' and killin' when they can, knowin' the Sioux will git the blame if the work is heard of inside the borders."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Marmion, anxiously.

"I reckon I be, or I wouldn't say it. I'm used to the cusses. I made the plains and the mountains my home, and I know all that rides, walks, creeps, or crawls over 'em."

"But you two travel fearlessly and alone," said old Mr. Herbeson.

"Yes. The red reptiles know better than to tackle the like of us. All they could make would be our hair, and they'd eat a good deal of lead and some steel afore they got that. But you've got animals, lots of ammunition, blankets and stores, and maybe some hard cash."

This last was said almost in a tone of inquiry; at any rate, the speaker's eyes had a searching look as he spoke.

"You've got what the Indians seem crazy after of late," said the younger stranger.

"What's that?" asked Harry Herbeson.

"Pretty women. They'll ride a thousand miles on the trail of such as them."

The fellow pointed to the girls, who drew back, blushing, from his admiring gaze.

"They will never get my sisters alive!" cried Marmion Herbeson.

"No!" echoed Harry. "We would defend them while living, and kill them ere we died rather than that they should fall into the hands of red or white miscreants who would abuse them."

And he looked fiercely at the younger stranger, who had eyed his pure sisters so closely all the time that they shrank from his gaze.

"That's game talk anyway. Live up to it. Let's be goin', Bill Deekin," said the fellow, speaking to the other.

"Good-night. If you keep your eyes peeled you may see us again 'twixt now an' Christmas," said the elder stranger, speaking to the Herbesons. "Come on, Carter—come on, or we'll be an hour after dark in reachin' our campin' ground."

The younger made no reply, but he looked again at the shrinking girls, and laughed strangely as he rode on.

"Father! Who or what were those men?" cried Susie, the elder of the two sisters.

"Their looks made me shudder from head to foot!" said Lottie, the younger and prettier.

"I know no more than you, my children. But I am glad they have gone. They may not be bad men, but if they are not, I am no judge of character by looks. We are well rid of them, in my opinion."

"If we are only rid of them, father," said Harry Herbeson. "When the older fellow said we might see them again between now and Christmas, there was a cold, steely look which almost made me shiver. If they are connected with any band of murderous Indians, or even more murderous white men, we may see them again, and to our sorrow."

"I trust in God there is no such danger," said the old man. "But forewarned is to be forearmed. We will keep extra guard to-night. One of us and one of the hands will patrol around the camp, watch by watch, all night. Before it is quite dark we will secure all the animals, and let our fire go out, so that no light will help an enemy to find us. What are you looking at, Marmion?"

"Those two men, my father. They rode straight on west until they reached the ridge ahead, and then they disappeared. Just now I am almost sure I saw their heads here on our right, riding east, over the edge of those sand hills."

"It may be your fears made you think you saw them, Marmion—it is getting too dark to ride over and see—have the hands got in the stock? We cannot get ready too soon to take care of what we have."

"Father, I have fears for myself," said the young

man, as he started with his brother to help get in the stock. "But for those we love better than life, I have fears all the time."

And he cast a tender look upon his beautiful sisters as he passed the tent.

"God will protect the innocent," said the old man, casting a reverent glance upward. "And in His own good time He will confound the guilty."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RENEGADE WHITES AND THEIR VILE DESIGNS.

Night had just set in—a night dark and cloudy.

In a deep basin, made by a rim of sand hills, where a small growth of willows showed there was water—located three leagues or thereabouts to the north-east of the spot where the Herbeson family were encamped, a body of about twenty men were circled around a small camp-fire. Their horses, saddled, as if for instant use, were picketed closely among some small patches of clump-grass.

The men, at a first glance, would be taken for Indians, for they were dressed and painted like Indians, and hideously too.

But their English talk, and especially their oaths and vulgar epithets, told that if the paint was off they would be white men.

"It is time Deekin and Carter got back. The trail we found was fresh—not an hour old, and they've had more than time to scout the party and see what is to be made," said one of these men—Indian in looks, as much as a white man could be.

"Talk of the devil and he always turns up!" said another, as a sharp whistle rang out from the crest of the sand hills to the south-west. "That is Bill Deekin's whistle."

"Yes," said the other. "And I see him and Carter agin the sky where the clouds break beyond the hill. Here they come."

In a minute more the two men whom we have seen at the camp of the Herbesons, rode into the circle and leaped from their horses which at once joined the others and went to cropping grass.

"So, cap, you're back! What news?" cried the Indian-looking wretch before alluded to.

The man known as Bill Deekin said, gruffly:

"The news is good enough. We've interviewed the party we trailed, as the newspaper cusses say. They're not very rich in the way of plunder, but they've got a lot of good animiles, good shootin' tools, some provision and campin' gear, most like some money, and what suits me and Carter, two of the likeliest lookin' gals we've seen since we quit the borders. They're as skrumptious as twin roses—bet your hair on that!"

"Gals is poor property, cap. We've had trouble enough in our gang about 'em, quarreling about first choice and all that. I say that dead women, like dead men, give no trouble and tell no tales. So I vote to kill and scalp the whole goblin' of 'em. That's Injun, all over, and when we play Injun let's do it up to the handle. I don't believe in pickin' gooseberries, when we're arter strawberries."

"Hort Grizzle, you're a fool!"

"Thankee, cap. Tell me somethin' I don't know."

"I'll tell you something you don't seem to know, much as you brag of bein' the best Injun in the gang. The Indians never kill a pretty white woman without there is danger of losin' her by recapture. Then they'll shove a knife or a bullet into her quicker than greased lightnin'. We'll do this job up regular Injun fashion. We'll kill and scalp the men, and keep the women for wives."

"Wives without the help of a parson."

"In course. Parsons aren't in our deal."

"And you mean when you say we, you and Carter?"

"In course I do. Haven't we scouted the trail and run all the risk, and aren't we goin' to lead the rush when we swoop down on 'em, and run the next risk. They'll fight like devils if we don't surprise 'em!"

"Well, you are cap'n. It isn't for me to grumble, tho' it seems as if you went in for the lion's share all the time."

Bill Deekin made no reply, but turning to another of the gang, cried out:

"Hunker Ben—where's the bourbon? I'm as dry as tinder!"

Hunker Ben, about as well disguised as any of the others, arose from the blanket where he had been lying with his feet to the fire, and lifted up what he had been using for a pillow.

It was a large demijohn, which the captain uncorked and raised to his mouth.

It was held there some time, while a gurgling noise told why it was held there.

Satisfied at last, the captain lowered the article and offered it to Carter. The latter shook his head and said:

"No, cap; you drink enough for me and a half dozen more. Keep your red-eye for yourself. I don't hanker after it."

The captain grunted out some reply which brought a laugh from those that heard it. Then he took a watch from inside his hunting-coat, and, bending over the fire-light, noted the time.

"Who is on watch till midnight?" he asked, as he put the watch back.

"Me and Hort Grizzle," said a young, beardless fellow, who looked like a boy Indian.

"Well, it lacks two hours till then, and I need rest. Call me when your watch is up. We'll start three hours afore day, and we can take our time. Injuns always take the gray of dawn for surprises when they can. Then folks that aren't sharp on Injun ways think the danger is over, and are most careless."

The captain now went to his horse, unfastened a blanket from the back of his saddle, and, wrapping it about him dropped down on the ground, feet to the fire.

Carter, not bothering about a blanket, was already in a similar position, and now all was still in the camp, save the sound made by the horses crunching at the short, tough grass or sattling their accouterments.

CHAPTER V.

THE IMPERILED CAMP.

"An hour before day is an early start, boys, but we must make it to reach Spotted Tail's camp before night to-morrow."

These were the last words Buffalo Bill spoke to Texas Jack and his mates when he turned in for the night, on his second night out, and they were so well remembered that long before the time the camp was all astir, teams harnessed, breakfast cooked and eaten, so as to start by or before the hour named.

The clouds which had obscured the sky during all the fore part of the night had now drifted away, and a clear, crispy air and a fresh breeze gave token of a clear day, cool and pleasant for travel, when it dawned.

With an early start, and the animals well fed from the grain in the forage wagons, the column made splendid headway on the start, and had gone fully two leagues by the time the gray of dawn began to show.

"What are you on now, Jack?" asked Buffalo Bill, as he overtook the latter, who had dismounted, and was examining some tracks.

"A wagon trail, not more than a night old, and an Indian trail right on it as fresh as if they'd just passed," said the scout. "Least way, it seems so to me, though it isn't light enough for me to make sure."

"I'll have to look at them," said Buffalo Bill, dismounting from his horse.

Bending down he made a long and careful examination.

"Yes; a wagon train, a small one, with shod mules and horses," he said. "And fresher yet the trail of unshod Indian horses. There may be mischief ahead—forward with the teams, men—forward at a trot!"

"Suppose I go ahead with my men at a lope, Bill?" said Texas Jack. "Our horses are fresh, and a run won't do 'em no hurt."

"No, if you go I go, Jack," cried Buffalo Bill. "I'd like to see you go for a fight and leave me behind a laggin'. Keep going, but not ahead of me."

"All right, Bill; you boss the crowd. But I feel just as

if there was a fight ahead of me, and I want to be into it."

"We'll soon have light enough to see, Jack. If there was a camping ground near I'd feel so, too. But it is a long ride from here to timber. When we see timber we'll be in sight of Spotted Tail's camp."

"Well, but hark, Bill. I am sure I heard a yell."

"No; it was a wolf, nothing more," said Bill, confidently.

"If so there's a pack of 'em," said Jack. "But hark! there's guns crackin' as sure as we both have life. Oh, Bill, let me ride on!"

"You're right; there is a fight. Escort, stay with the train. Sergeant, keep your men close together, and look to the wagons. I'm going with Texas Jack and his squad."

These orders were hastily given, and as soon as he saw that the sergeant understood and would obey him he turned in his saddle and shouted to Texas Jack and the little band of hunters:

"Now, boys, I'm ready! Follow me!"

And away, silent and swift, he rode, like a cloud before a gale, followed in the same silent way by men who if they knew fear would not show it.

Away in the glimmer of the early dawn, hearing shots and shrill yells far before them—away, giving their horses rein and spur as they flew forward.

Lighter and lighter as they hurried on, till looking forward they saw fully two miles ahead the white tops of wagons and a tent, and what looked like a squad of red fiends riding in a circle about the wagons.

Buffalo Bill, when he saw little puffs of smoke rise here and there, knew that a fearful fight was going on, and he gave a shout so wild and loud that he knew it must be heard by those who were fighting for life, and calling to his men to keep up if they killed their horses, swinging his white hat high in the air, on he rode madly to the rescue.

"Oh, ride—ride, boys, or we'll be too late!" he shouted, as the firing all at once seemed to slacken away, while the yells rose louder and louder to his ears.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNFORTUNATE FATHER.

"Too late—too late!" cried Buffalo Bill, while yet a mile away from the wagons, now seen so plainly ahead, for the firing had altogether ceased.

But he did not slacken his speed, though his horse from the start had been put to the utmost—for he saw the Indians suddenly form in a compact line and ride swiftly off in a direction which would, if long followed, take them to the great Black Hills so well known to all mountaineers and plainsmen.

"The cusses wouldn't wait for us!" said Texas Jack, as his panting horse ranged alongside of that rode by Buffalo Bill—"but I reckon our comin' has saved the train."

"Not them that was with it, I fear!" said the noble scout, as he pressed on his now almost exhausted horse. "I don't see a living man with the wagons, and the red curs have carried off all the stock."

Texas Jack said never a word now. He drew his breath hard and struck the spurs into the flanks of his horse till the animal groaned as it galloped on.

A minute more and they were at the wagons. These were three in number, with a tent in the angle formed by their arrangement.

On the ground in front of the wagons lay two young and noble-looking men, shot dead and scalped—and directly in front of the tent lay an old man, who seemed dead, and who would have been scalped had not age robbed the crown of his head of its hair.

No other sign of man or woman, dead or alive, could be seen around the deserted wagons, and not even a dead Indian. If any of them were slain they had been carried off by the retreating gang—now far away, riding at rapid speed.

"The old man is not dead—but there's hardly life left," said Buffalo Bill, as he bent over him. "He has been first shot and then knocked down with a club or gun-breech. The cusses went for him sure!"

"Look there, Bill—look there! There were woman in the tent!" cried Texas Jack, pointing to some female clothing hanging to the tent-pole inside.

There were women. Heaven

alone can help them now—for they're in the worst hands that helpless women ever knew. If the sympathizers with the poor red men knew how they treat white female captives the Lo stock would sink below par. But we can do nothing now. I daren't take the escort from the train, nor can I leave the train until it is at Spotted Tail's camp!"

"Let me go, Bill—they're not more than ten to one of my party!" cried Texas Jack.

"No—no. I must be in the fight when they are overhauled. But give me your canteen of water, Jack—we must try and save this old man, so he can tell us how it all went."

Jack went to his saddle, got the canteen, and while Bill was at work at the old man he examined the two young men who were dead.

"Hi, Bill!" he shouted, as he bent down close and looked at the heads of these men. "This work was never done by reds. These scalps have been haggled off by white men. You know as well as I that Indians make a clean cut and whip it off at a jerk."

"I'll see in a minute—the old man is coming to," said Bill, redoubling his exertions to revive the wounded man.

"There isn't an arrow or a spear wound either in one of 'em," said Jack, as he turned the bodies over. "Injuns would have left 'em stuck as full as an old granny's pin-cushion. This has been done by white men tryin' to play Injun. They're botches in the business. I could do better myself."

The exertions of Buffalo Bill had brought the old man so far back to life that he could see and recognize that friendly aid was there, but he seemed unable to speak. His head had been fearfully bruised, he had a bullet through his shoulder, and another in his side.

The wagon-train and escort were now coming on at a trot, and Bill waited for it impatiently, for there were medical stores there that he needed, and an ambulance in which the wounded man could be laid.

When the train came up the wounded man had huskily whispered two words, and then relapsed into insensibility. These two words were:

"My daughters?"

Buffalo Bill now had the wounded man put in the ambulance, and detailed a soldier to watch over him, and then he held a hurried consultation with Texas Jack and the sergeant, while a detail of men were set to work to bury the dead men.

"We'd better burn these wagons, for they'd be emptied by them cusses after we're gone," said Texas Jack.

"No; 'twould be better yet to leave 'em as a bait to lure them back with," said Buffalo Bill. "We've no—but what in thunder are we thinking of—there's the harness on the poles—we've extra horses—we'll harness to 'em and drag them to Spotted Tail's camp, and leave them there while we go for the reds."

"Boss, I tell you there weren't any reds in this work—they were white men."

"Jack, I saw 'em with my own eyes—feathers, and naked hides; I could almost see the war-paint."

"I'd like to see it washed off, boss. I've seen their work, and it isn't Injun. Go and look for yourself. Hello! where in grief did you come from?"

The last inquiry was addressed to a man who made his appearance so suddenly that it seemed as if he had come from the ground.

"I greep out from der wagon-pox, where I hide when I hear dem Inchins screech," said the man—Dutch in dialect, Dutch in face, and Dutch from head to foot. "I trives der mools for Mynheer Herbeson—me, Carl Whangheimer."

"Whangheimer! What a name to meet in a dark night!" said Texas Jack. "Did you see the Indians, Mr. Whangheimer?"

"Nein. I hear 'em yell, und den I hide, und den dey shoot, und de gals scream, und I was scare all to death."

"You're a nice fellow, you are, to hear gals a screamin' and not fight for 'em. But, say, did you hear them Injuns talking English?"

"Nein. I was too much scare. Dey didn't spryken Ditcher, or I hear dat."

"Let him alone, Jack; you can't get nothing out of him—he is yellow from fright yet. We must get in motion."

We can do nothing till I have got the train into Spotted Tail's camp. Hitch on to these wagons with our spare horses, and we'll go ahead as fast as we can. The train delivered, I'll not sleep till we're on the trail of these murderers, be they red or white."

"One word to this Dutchman, boss—one question, and I'll go to work. Mr. Whangheimer, how many gals were there?"

"Two—der Mynheer Herbeson's daughters. Lieben frauleins—oh, so handsome! Dunder!"

The Dutchman exhausted himself with a look, expressing as much as his words, and then sank back in apathy, while he pulled an old pipe from his pocket and began to fill it.

"Strangers in our rear, riding at a gallop!" said the sergeant, saluting Captain Cody.

"See who thy are—keep the escort mounted!" cried Buffalo Bill, remounting his horse, which now had got its wind again.

"A citizen, with an escort of six cavalry men!" reported the sergeant, as the party in the rear came galloping on.

The next moment a young, fine-looking man, about Cody's height, with a rather handsome face, keen, dark eyes, a heavy mustache, in citizen's dress, but well-mounted and armed, rode up.

"Whoop snakes and belles of Baltimore—its Eugene Overton," shouted Buffalo Bill. "You promised me you'd come, but I thought it was all promise and nothing more. Old boy, I'm glad to see you—how did you get on my trail?"

"I reached the fort about three hours after you left, with letters from the general, and the colonel at once gave me an escort to let me join you on this trip. I want to see all the life I can in the little time I have to spare."

"You're just in time, friend Overton. Look there!"

And Buffalo Bill pointed to the dead men whom the soldiers were in the act of burying.

"There's been bad work done and hair taken here last night, and just as soon as I get this train into Spotted Tail's camp I shall take after them that did it, and show 'em Nebraska justice. I'm a justice of the peace at home, and I'll continue my office just as long as I'm on their trail!"

"Dead men—and scalped!" said Overton, with a look of horror. "I didn't expect to see such a sight!"

"Pooh! I'll show you better sights than that before you're off the plains. You put me through a course of sprouts in New York, and I'll return the favor out here. This is only a snifter to break in on."

Overton shuddered. The realities of savage life had come upon him suddenly, indeed.

"There's something more than that to shudder at, friend Overton!" continued Buffalo Bill. "In the ambulance, in the rear, the father of those two young men lies terribly wounded, almost dead, while the wretches who did this work, either Indians or disguised white men, have carried off his young daughters—two beautiful white girls, as the Dutch driver, the only one unhurt of the party, describes."

"Horror!" cried Overton. "Why not ride on at once and rescue them. I'll go and take my first lesson in Indian fighting gladly under your leadership. Come—come, let us dash on after them."

"My heart talks just as yours does, Overton, but my head is level. I've got my duty to do as a government officer. This train must reach Spotted Tail's camp. When that is done I'll follow my heart and take the trail of the murderers like a hound after a wounded buck-deer."

"And I'll be with you to do all I can to help the unfortunate."

"Good! I'm glad you are along. And I can keep the escort sent with you I reckon, though I must send back the men who came with the wagon train."

"We're ready to move, sir," said the wagon master.

"The burial is over, captain," said the sergeant, saluting.

"All right, sergeant. Mount your escort and we'll move forward as fast as we can travel. I'll take the lead. Leave that tent standing; it will be a good mark if we get back here in the night. For I'll be on the trail by sunrise to-morrow, or there'll be another conundrum for me to

solve. Come, Overton, we'll take the lead to-day. I want to talk to you all about the lovelies on Brevoort place, the Johnny Bull artist, and George Bevans, that tall, handsome policeman that I took a fancy to. See, I wear his army pin in preference to the diamonds of Alexis."

"Boss, mightn't me and a couple of the boys take the trail of them chaps and scout 'em till you come up?" asked Texas Jack. "I can leave signs you'll know, and maybe keep 'em so busy there'll no hurt come to the gals till we can make a break for em."

Texas Jack said this as he rode up to Buffalo Bill just after the column got in motion.

The noble scout gave the subject a momentary thought, and then said:

"Jack, I don't know but you're right. If you'll promise me one thing I'll let you take a couple of men and go."

"What is that, boss?"

"That you will only trail them. It would be madness for three to try to fight forty, and there's fully that many of them, by the trail."

"I'm not apt to be crazy in such matters, boss. I'll take care of my hair. I'm not insured, and don't want to lose it. I'll keep the trail and leave signs for you to follow night or day."

"Then go, Jack, and luck go with you. At sunrise I'll be on the trail riding as if Custer was ahead, and you know how that is."

In an instant Texas Jack and two chosen hunters dashed out from the column to take the trail.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MURDEROUS ATTACK.

We will go back, for to teach others how camps are surprised is a part of the duty of the historical novelist who is faithful to his work. And the author claims to be. His pictures are real life descriptions, every scene true to nature.

It was breaking from the gloom of night into the gray of coming dawn.

The watch had just been changed in the Herbeson camp—Harry Herbeson and a negro—the driver of the second wagon relieving Marmion Herbeson and the Dutchman, Carl Whangheimer.

The latter had climbed into his wagon to go to sleep as soon as he was relieved, but Marmion had staid with his brother to speak about the journey of the day, and the negro alone was patrolling while the two brothers stood and talked.

Suddenly Harry paused, for he heard a sound like the coming of a gust of heavy wind over the prairie.

The next instant he saw a cloud-like mass close upon the camp, and with a quick, piercing shout:

"Indians! To arms!" he raised his gun, and fired at the galloping horde, which, discovered, came yelling up on them.

A murderous bullet wound in the back of the neck caused Harry Herbeson to drop to the ground. As he fell he saw Bill Deekin, followed by his gang of painted ruffians, bound into the little inclosure, and in an instant the wildest tumult prevailed, the occupants of the surprised camp fighting valiantly for their lives.

Harry, although fatally wounded, endeavored to rise, but weakness overcame him, and he merely managed to raise the upper part of his body, resting his weight on his left arm.

Drawing his revolver with the other hand, he aimed the weapon at Bill Deekin, whom he saw rudely dragging his sister Susie from the tent.

Weakness made Harry's arm unsteady, and the bullet sped harmlessly aside. With a gasp of agony as he thought of his sisters' probable fate, he made another effort to arise, but he sank helpless to the earth, and for him life was over.

At the same moment Mr. Herbeson, who fought as only a father can fight when his family is in danger, saw his daughter's peril, and rushed to her rescue, forgetting all other foes but the wretch who clutched Susie by the wrist.

He had only made a few steps toward the scoundrel when a rifle wound in the breast stopped all his efforts for succor. He reeled backward, and dropped bleeding to the earth.

Lottie Herbeson had been unceremoniously seized as the prey of the scoundrel Carter, but as his coarse hand touched her she fainted from terror.

Heedless of her condition, he lifted the unconscious girl in his arms, and bore her off toward the horses, while Marmion Herbeson, struggling to reach her by dashing through the four wretches whom he was fighting, received his death-wound.

Even Norfolk Ben, the darkey, had fought with heroic determination. But his weapon, seized at the moment the camp was surprised, chanced to be only a frying-pan. But with this he was successful in defending himself, and left two or three sore heads by blows from it.

Observing the girls in the hands of the captors, and aware that force could now accomplish nothing, falling on his knees, the darky piteously exclaimed:

"Oh, de blessed Lor'! oh, marse! Injuns, don't kill my honeys! Don't kill dese blessed angel creeturs!"

"Hold yer yap, you black devil! Don't kill him, Hort Grizzle; want a nigger to wait on me," shouted a white man in buckskin, whom the girls only too quickly recognized as one of their dreaded visitors of the night before.

"Cap, there's no time for talk. Mount the men—put the gals into their saddles. I'll see to the stock. There's help comin' that we don't want!" cried Carter, as he rushed to the spot, and now the girls felt that no hope was left, when they saw his villainous face.

But they had no time to think—not even to pray aloud, for their own horses, saddled, were brought up, they were lifted on and bound there, and the next instant, in the center of the yelling mass of fiends, with old Ben on a mule close beside them, the man called Captain Bill Deekin on one side, and Carter on the other, they sped away—away at terrible speed, leaving the dead behind them, for the wretched girls had no thought that their father or brothers lived—they had seen them fall.

Oh, what agony for them—no hope! And it was even worse when, by the foul talk on every hand, they learned that white renegades, even worse than savage Indians, had them in their power.

Mile after mile, league after league, without a stop, and the girls so weary they would have fallen from exhaustion but for the straps which fastened them to their saddles, and the rude, harsh hands laid upon their shoulders by the fiendish men on either side to hold them up. Miles without a word being spoken.

At last, from sheer fatigue, the animals slackened their speed, though still urged on by merciless riders.

"Halt here—ride to yonder peak, Hunker Ben, and look back over our trail!" shouted Bill Deekin at last, when it was full moon and they had reached a small stream between two hills where a few scattered trees made shade and some tolerable grass gave the horses a chance for feed.

"Gals—no squawkin', and no bother now—or it'll be the worse for you! We're goin' to let you rest a bit, here in the shade—if you're still and quiet. If you ain't—you'll see what I'm made of and larn that Old Nick isn't half so bad!" said the ruffian leader.

The shuddering girls dared not speak. Too full of grief to even weep they were now only too glad of a chance to clasp their arms about each other's neck and to hide their faces from the gaze of the fiends around them, as they sobbed out whispered agonies with heads bent down.

Now for the first time Carter had a chance to tell Bill Deekin the nature of the party which he had seen approaching when they had to mount and leave the Herbeson camp without the plunder they craved. "'Twas a Government train, with soldiers in uniform, far back, but then closing in on us like mad wolves, were them cussed scouts, bordermen, that don't fear nothin', and Indians less than nothin'—such chaps as Forsyth had when he whipped off a hundred reds to his one, though he lost some of the best of his band, too."

"Them scouts are worse than tigers on a trail!" muttered the ruffian captain. "If they're on our trail yet we'll have but little peace before we're with the main band in the

Black Hills. Once there, with all our men, we're strong enough to whip a regiment."

"Cap'n—we'd better up and git. There's mounted scouts a couple o' mile back. I saw 'em rise a ridge!" cried Hunker Ben, coming down from his post.

"Mount, men—mount again!" shouted the captain. "A short rest is better than none, but this has been too cussed short."

"Cap—we've got to scatter—that's the only way to throw these scouts from the trail. And it's Injun, too, all over, to do that. S'pose you take one gal and I'll take the other, and—"

"Oh, in Heaven's name, do not separate us!" cried Susie, the elder.

"Kill us together, but do not tear us apart!" cried Lottie, wildly but bravely.

"'Twould be rough, Carter—'twould be rough. Let's please the little dears all we can. They'll take to us better if we do. Suppose you and me and the darky with the two girls take one route, and let the party all scatter in fives—then the scouts'll have more than they can do to find the right trail."

"You don't know them cusses as I do," said Carter. "They'll hit the right trail if there's twenty false ones. But let it be as you say. One thing is sure—I'll not lose sight of my gal!"

And his sensual gaze rested on the lovely face and form of Lottie, whom he was again securing to her saddle.

"We can't separate till night any way, if the scouts are nigh, for they'd see where each party headed. Onward, boys, once more, and let your horses have the spur! Change once in a while, the heaviest men on a led horse, for we've got to make time."

Again the ruffian cavalcade sped on, and when the scouts seen in the rear were once more sighted from a ridge, they had lost fully a mile if not more.

"We lead 'em every jump!" cried Deekin, in glee, as he sped forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LODGE QUEEN.

It was not late in the day when the train under charge of Buffalo Bill came in sight of the camp of Spotted Tail. It was located near a stream and where timber was plenty and the smoke from many camp-fires rose in graceful columns above the grove.

When in sight, leaving the train to follow at its best speed, Buffalo Bill, with Mr. Overton and a small escort, dashed forward.

The Indians, all under arms before they knew whether friend or foe was coming recognized "Long Knife" before he was within a half mile, and Spotted Tail, Two-Strike, Red Leaf, and a long band of his warriors rode out in gala dress to receive and salute him.

Firing their guns in the air, and whooping wildly, they dashed on toward the little party, and Overton, not used to that sort of thing, asked Bill if they meant well by it. To him it looked like war.

"The reds have that way of showing they're glad to see me—but it's a waste of powder!" said Buffalo Bill, quietly. "Don't mind their antics. There's no danger now—they're not wasting lead. That is worth as much or more than silver out here."

By this time the Indians were up and Spotted Tail rode in alongside of Buffalo Bill and grasped his outstretched hand and when introduced that of Mr. Overton.

"You thought us a long time coming with the presents from the Great Father, did you not?" asked the scout.

"The Great Father is the master of his own time. Why should we who are poor, and so far away, count it. When we are so poor that we have to take gifts why should we call for those who give to make haste. We were not starving."

"Well—the presents are here or close behind—forty good horses, meat and bread to eat, tools to make gardens with, and corn to plant."

"The red men do not want tools. They will not work, or plow, and dig, and plant like the pale-faces and the men who are black. I told the Great Father so when I was in

Washington. We want guns, and powder, and lead to hunt with—blankets to keep our women warm."

"Well, I have some of them," said Buffalo Bill. "I think you and your braves will be satisfied. I have three wagons in my train which do not belong to me. They are the property of an old man who is very sick with wounds got in a fight with bad men this morning. His two sons were killed by them—his two daughters and a negro car-



"I WILL SEND OUT MY BRAVES TO DRINK THEIR BLOOD!"

ried off. The old man is in my ambulance and his well man is here to wait on him."

"Who did this? Not Sioux?" asked Spotted Tail abruptly.

"No—I expect it was white men disguised as Indians."

"Ugh! I will send out my braves to drink their blood."

"No, you must do no such thing. You have promised peace and you must keep it to all, bad or good, without you or your tribe is struck. Then you have a right to defend yourselves."

"Are we not struck in our good name, when pale-faces put on war-paint and make war as if it were us?"

"Yes; in your honor. But here we are in your camp. Where is Dove Eye?"

"She is sole queen of my lodge now—my wives are dead. She will be glad to see Long Rifle—she knows he is coming."

"I have presents for her from people who have heard about her in the great cities where the sun rises," said Buffalo Bill. "Will she not come out to receive them?"

"Her mother died but four suns gone by—her hair is down—she mourns. She will not come out now, but my son, Long Rifle, can go into the lodge. He will be welcome."

Buffalo Bill alone entered the lodge.

Dove Eye rose from her seat on a pile of beautiful furs, and with her arms meekly folded on her bosom, bent her head down and waited for him to speak.

"Is Dove Eye glad to see her old friend?" asked the scout, as he extended his hand.

Dove Eye took it, raised it reverently to her lips. Then she spoke:

"Is the little flower glad to see the sun after the long, cold night? Then Dove Eye is glad to see the master of her heart. He can speak, but this cannot."

And Dove Eye took from her bosom the picture she had obtained—the scout did not know from whom or how—and showed it to him.

"I have brought Dove Eye some presents from friends far away that have heard that she is good, and beautiful, and very brave," said the scout, deeply moved by the incident of the picture. "They are in the wagons, which will soon be here. I will give them to Dove Eye before I

go away."

"Dove Eye wants no gifts from strangers," she said, coldly. "One look from Long Rifle is more to her than a thousand robes like that the great prince gave me at the hunt. Long Rifle said he was going away. When?"

"In a little time. Just as soon as the presents are taken out of the wagons and given to your father."

"Why must Long Rifle go so soon? Dove Eye will bind up her hair now that he has come. She will put on her scarlet robe and her coronet, and she will try to look well in his sight."

"You always look well, Dove Eye—but I must take the war-path in a hurry. Three of my hunters are on it now, trailing my enemies—and I must follow. Two fair pale-face girls are helpless in the hands of bad men, who are hurrying to hide in the Black Hills. I must overtake them and rescue the girls. I would not be worthy the name of a warrior if I did not. Did I not take you from the



"IS DOVE EYE GLAD TO SEE HER OLD FRIEND?" ASKED BUFFALO BILL, AS HE EXTENDED HIS HAND.

clutches of the Yellow Bear? Shall I not save them as well? It is my duty to your sex, to my manhood, and to the Great Spirit."

"Then Dove Eye will speak against it no more. She loves Long Rifle because he is a great warrior. She will have food cooked, so he may not go away hungry."

The Lodge Queen bound up the great masses of long black hair which fell far below her waist, and then, while Buffalo Bill went out to receive the wagon-train, she hurried to set her women to making a feast for the visitors.

CHAPTER IX.

A LETTER IN RED.

When Texas Jack dashed away from the column under Buffalo Bill, with but two followers, he did not do so in a mere spirit of recklessness, with no particular object in view; he was too cool, too old in border-life, too well versed in the rascality which he wished to trail up until it could be overcome and published, to do anything rashly or in folly.

He knew how necessary it was to keep the trail of these men, and to save those helpless girls, and the villains must have no time to rest and abuse them.

So he pressed his strong, wiry horse all that he dared, and he soon came in sight of the retreating gang. He was willing that they should see that they were followed, for he argued to his mates that they'd keep going as long as

they could, and the girls would be sater for it.

"Our horses," said he, "are as good stock as there is on the plains, and I'll risk but what we can close when we want to."

Thus he rode on until the ruffians made their noon halt, which Jack soon broke up, and although he appeared to have lost ground for a while after they started it was to make them think his horses were tired, when in truth they were yet fresh and strong.

The long, steady gallop had not tired them during the day, as the swift dead-run at full speed in the morning, and they held well, after they had been watered and had a ten minutes' pull at the grass in the valley by the stream where the gang of Bill Deekin had stopped.

As night drew on, and the country began to be more rolling, with patches of brush here and there, Texas Jack closed upon the trail, leaving once in a while a white rag on a bush where it grew near the trail, tearing up the only "biled shirt" he had for that purpose.

"We've got to keep 'em in sight about dark," said he. "Because then, if they're sharp, they'll scatter, with an understanding of where they'll all meet, so as to throw us off the trail that the gals are taken on. But the fools for get, I reckon, that the gals are riding shod horses, for I've seen that all along, and saw where the gals got off in the valley, for their small feet and the tracks of the shod horses were close alongside of each other."

"They're not so soft as you take 'em to be, Jack; look there," said one of his men, pointing to a lot of horse-shoes just torn from the horses' feet and left on the ground where



"WRITTEN WITH HER OWN BLOOD!"

the work had been done. "Now all the tracks will be alike."

"Not by daylight," said Jack. "The girls are light weight—their horses will make a shallow track where there's sand, as there is every few rods. And there's another comfort in this; the horses the gals are on will go dead lame in a little while, with their shoes off. I tell you, Charlie, it's no use for them curs to think they'll get away from Texas Jack. How dark it's getting! Now they'll scatter. Keep your eyes to the trail, boys, as well as me. Three pair of eyes are like three pair in a hand—they'll make it the more sure."

Jack now rode on silent, and cautious, watching the trail which yet seemed as one until it came to a hard dry ridge.

"Here is the place we'll lose 'em if we ever do," said Jack. "This ground won't show a hoof-mark. But there's a level beyond, which will."

Dashing his spurs into the flank of his horse, he rode swiftly to a sandy plain yet to be seen in the gathering gloom, and here he found a trail. At the same instant the man to his right found one—then the other to the left

fully a hundred yards found another—all diverging.

"Scattered—and night is upon us," muttered Texas Jack. "I can't see the trail plain enough to judge which is which. Let's keep on, boys—on, and trust to Providence that it will be the right one. They say Heaven helps the good, and them young gals must be good, for I never saw a nobler lookin' man than their father."

In silence he took the trail he had at first come to, and leading his horse, so he could better see the ground, the brave hunter moved forward.

At times he had to stop and actually feel for the trail, but he would not give it up—he still kept forward, feeling that now more than ever those helpless ones would need his aid.

"Didn't I say there was help for the good in heaven?" he cried, when he had been on the right trail nearly an hour. "Look, boys!"

And turning he showed them a white handkerchief which he had found on a bush.

"One of the gals has done this on purpose to show us, if we are following. Thunder—there's red marks on it!"

He lighted a match, and saw, written in blood, these words:

"If this is found by friends, come quickly. They say that they will stop soon, and then—oh, may Heaven have mercy on us!"

SUSIE HERBESON.

"Written, with her own blood!"

"Yes," said Texas Jack, "and with her finger, by the size of the letters. Keep on, boys—keep on as fast as you can. This handkerchief comes just in time, for the last rag of my shirt was gone."

The noble fellow had left strips of white every hundred yards or thereabout, since dark, upon his trail—and he had now to tear the handkerchief in strips to follow it up.

The way became more and more difficult, for now the darkness was becoming dense, and but for the hope, mingled with the fear, induced by what that poor girl had written, the brave hunter would have halted till morning.



"FORWARD!—IN HEAVEN'S NAME, FORWARD!" SHOUTED TEXAS JACK.

Suddenly, and it went wildly thrilling through their hearts, a woman's shriek came rushing to their ears.

"Forward!—in Heaven's name, forward!" shouted Texas Jack.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE.

And as Texas Jack exclaimed "Forward!" letting go the bridle of his tired horse, he rushed on at the fullest speed on foot, while his two companions followed.

Again there was a wild, plaintive scream, nearer now than before, and Texas Jack heard the rush of some one running through the grass and bushes, while still farther on a man's loud curses, with cries of "Stop! stop!" were heard.

"One of the gals has broke away—she will be here in a minute. Save her while I nail the cuss that's coming!" cried Jack, in a tone loud enough for his hunters to hear, then when the girl flew so close past him that he could have touched her, for he stepped aside, he kept on a few paces and stopped just as another scream from her told him that his mates had her safe.

Then, as a man came rushing on, breathing bitter curses and threats, he stooped, and meeting him head on, like a butting ram, he literally felled him breathless to the earth.

The next second he was on top of him, and with the butt of his heavy navy revolver he dealt him a blow on the head which effectually silenced and disabled him for the time.

Instantly, losing not a second, he unstrapped the man's own belt, and bound his hands securely behind him, stuffed a part of his buckskin hunting-coat in his mouth, and bandaged it there; then he called to his own men to come up.

Already they had assured the poor girl that they were friends, and now, when she reached Texas Jack, she moaned out:

"Oh, go and save poor Susie! She is in as bad hands as I was."

"Help me to do it, gal—help me to do it, and be quick!" cried Texas Jack.

"How? Only tell me how! I will die for her!"

"Livin' for her will do more good. Come with me, and cry pitifully while I lead you on. He'll think you're caught, and his mate is comin' back with you. Your sister'll be safe till we get there, I hope. Sing out now, for we've no time to spare."

Lottie at once understood his plan, and she cried pitiously:

"Let me go—oh, in mercy, let me go!" as Texas Jack rushed on in the direction from which she had come.

Jack swept on as swiftly as she could follow him, and now and then hoarsely uttering an oath or threat as the fellow had done, while his own men followed, making as little noise as they could, confident that the man who was knocked down and tied could do nothing toward making his escape before their return.

"Louder! louder! for I see a light!" whispered Jack, looking back to Lottie.

And louder she did scream:

"Oh, have pity—have pity on me!"

"So, Carter, you've got her. My gal is in a dead faint. Hurry back, so I can get water for her!" shouted a voice ahead, and then Texas Jack saw a sight which made his blood boil madly.

A girl lay like one dead upon the ground near a fire—just beyond her, a negro, bound hand and foot, and gagged, was lying on his back, his great eyes wild with pain or fear, and a brutal giant of a man, with tangled hair and beard, grizzled with coming age, was holding the girl's small hand in his, as if feeling her pulse.

"I'm coming!" shouted Jack, as he came into the circle of light, and the ruffian sprang to his feet as he heard the strange voice, and drew his pistol from his belt.

But Jack was on him as he was cocking it, and both rolled to the ground together, the pistol exploding at the moment they fell.

For an instant they struggled, then, with a terrible wrench the ruffian turned his opponent over, and with a monstrous knife he would have ended his career, for it was descending upon his unshielded heart, when the negro, with wonderful coolness, kicked with his hampered feet, as he swung his body around, and struck the descending arm.

The knife flew from the ruffian's hand, and then both of the mates of Texas Jack were upon him before he could regain the weapon, or even snatch at the remaining pistol from his belt.

Fearfully did Bill Deekin struggle for freedom, but Jack was on his feet in a second more, and a heavy blow dropped Deekin helpless to the ground.

A second broke the arm which tried once more to draw a pistol, and a yell of agony burst from his lips as the wretch succumbed to the overmatch.

"Darky, you saved my life, and I owe you the best turn I can ever do for you!" cried Texas Jack, as he cut the bonds of the negro, and took the gag from his mouth.

"De Lor', marse white man, if you is a fren', indeed, you is a fren' in need. My dear honey dare, Missee Susie, she done went dead, I reckon, when Missee Lottie run away. I hasn't seen her stir since!" cried the negro, Norfolk Ben, as he rose to his feet.

"She lives! she lives! It was a faint—a dreadful, death-like faint!" cried Lottie, who had sprung to the help of her sister even while the fight was going on.

"Oh, sister! my Lottie! are you here? Oh, who, who are these?" moaned Susie, as she looked around.

"Friends—friends, sister, and we are saved!" said Lottie, weeping. "Look! the captain of our brutal captors is wounded, disarmed, and bound. The wretch from whom I fled—the horrible monster!—is also bound and helpless. See! our good Ben, ever faithful, is free also."

"Yes, bless de Lor'! dat's so. Here I is, ready to fight, and bleed, an' die for you, sweet honey—dat I is! Oh, dis is better dan follerin' Gen'l Kearney troo dem seben days' fights afore Richmond dat I hearn de darkies tell about."

And Ben raised his hands and his eyes skyward.

"Charlie, you and Barnett go and get the horses, and drag in that other cuss. We'll let 'em lay and think till daylight, and then we'll make up how we'd better send 'em down to their master!" said Jack.

The two hunters started back to obey their leader, while the sisters conversed in low, glad tones, broken now and then by hysterical sobs, more of joy than grief, though orphaned, as they believed they were, and brotherless, they had enough to grieve about.

But relief from the last terrible danger, worse than death, made them forget all else.

"Stranger, you aren't busy just now?" said Bill Deekin, looking at Texas Jack, who had just thrown a stick of wood on the fire to light the hunters back.

"No—not very" said Jack.

"Do you know my right arm is broken snap off?" asked the other.

"I ought to, since I did it, and on purpose, too, to keep you from usin' your shootin' iron too careless."

"Well, you might set the bones together and tie 'em up just for accommodation."

"I don't know as 'twill accommodate me much. As to you 'twon't make much difference. You'll never have occasion to use it after to-morrow, if I'm the 'court,' and I expect I shall be."

"Stranger, are you human?"

"To humans I'm human. To beasts I'm the other way, I reckon."

"Jack, that other chap has got away—slipped or gnawed out his fastenings. He is gone, and so are our horses, too!"

This was the cry which came from the lips of the hunters who had been sent to bring in Carter and the horses, as they rushed back.

"Hey! If Carter is gone the court mayn't sit to-morrow," said Bill Deekin, with a sneer.

"Just lock your jaw, or the court will hold in about five minutes, and you'll die in five more!" cried Texas Jack, sternly. Then he turned to the men.

"Put out the fire, as soon as I gag this wretch. I don't want to kill him yet—I may want to use him. We've got to hold on till Buffalo Bill gets to us, and he'll not be long a comin'. Gals, I'll just throw a blanket over you to keep the chill off, for we've got to lay snug and still till morning. Then we'll know better what to do."

Texas Jack now took the gag which had been used in Ben's mouth and fixed it firmly in that of Bill Deekin, and then bound him securely. Then the fire was put out.

CHAPTER XI.

DOVE EYE'S GIFTS.

It was but a little while after Dove Eye gave her orders before a rich, and, for an Indian camp, a rarely delicate

feast was made ready for Buffalo Bill and his friends.

And while Spotted Tail, with his chiefs and warriors, were rejoicing over the presents sent to them by the Great Father, the beautiful Lodge Queen, now robed in scarlet, with her coronet on her head, to do honor to Buffalo Bill and his friends came to invite all to eat.

As his horses had to rest and feed, the gallant scout had no desire to disappoint her, much as he wished to hurry back and take the trail which Texas Jack was already upon.

So all went to partake of the bountiful repast which she had got ready, and, hungry men as they were, they did ample justice to her hospitality.

But after they had supped, and his horses had eaten the last substantial food they would be apt to get for a good while, selecting from such horses as could be spared from the train and escort enough to have a led horse for a change for himself and each man in his party, Buffalo Bill made his preparations to start.

The train of empty wagons was to return to the fort under charge of the sergeant and his men, and to the non-commissioned officer Captain Cody gave a written report to take to headquarters, detailing what he had done. With him also he sent the old gentleman, Mr. Herbeson, and Carl Whangheimer to wait on him, also sending back his wagons as private property to be protected.

Mr. Herbeson was yet too low to talk, but when Buffalo Bill told him he would rescue his daughters if it lay in the power of man, his eyes beamed out thanks he could not speak.

Spotted Tail was anxious to send a band of warriors with Buffalo Bill to help him, but the latter would not hear to it.

He would take that adventure all upon himself, for he would not risk encouraging anything which might compromise the peace promises of the great chief.

He counted his men. First, he had Eugene B. Overton, a gentleman who was to take his first lesson in the field now. But he was ardent, a fair rider, well armed, and looked as if courage was a heritage.

Then came his escort of six good, well armed and well mounted cavalymen. But, best of all, our hero looked upon seven hunters whom he knew—men often tried, and as often proved—brave, hardy, skilled in arms and in all the phases of warfare on the plains.

His party thus made, with himself, fifteen men—fourteen used to such work as was before them, the fifteenth full of vim, and anxious to make his mark while he had the chance.

It was well on in the evening when he and his party were mounted, but the great fires built by the Indians made the scene as light as day.

"Long Rifle will take this gift from me," said Spotted Tail; "he may find it of use. Every chief of all the tribes on the plains has seen it, and they will know where it came from. If one smokes with Long Rifle through that pipe he will be his friend when he wants him, for the sake of Spotted Tail."

The chief handed Buffalo Bill his great council pipe, made from the red stone of the far North-west, covered with curious devices from mouth-piece to bowl, and cased in the skin of a rattlesnake, adorned with beads.

"I will keep the pipe, and use it in my hour of needs, should that hour come," said Buffalo Bill.

"Dove Eye has a present for her heart's master," said the Lodge Queen. "Here it is."

She pointed to a beautiful but strong pony, loaded with a pack of provisions, led by a boy seated upon another pony—a keen, smart-looking boy, about her own size, whose bright eyes spoke courage and intelligence.

"The great warrior, Long Rifle, will be hungry by and by. I send with him cooked meat and bread made in the way Dove Eye learned to make it at the grand hunt, so she could please Long Rifle. And I send two ponies, and Kionee, the Creeper, who will take care of the ponies, and serve Long Rifle till he is tired of him. Then he can send him back to his tribe."

Buffalo Bill knew that it would pain Dove Eye very much to refuse her gifts, so he said:

"I thank Dove Eye. I will use her gifts. Kionee, the Creeper, shall ride close to me in the march, and sleep at my feet at night. I will try to keep him safe, and when I

send him back to Dove Eye send him without a hurt."

"Kionee is not afraid of scars!" said the boy, proudly, straightening up in his saddle.

"He will be a great brave. Wear these, and use them if you have a chance," said Spotted Tail, and he unbelted his own knife and revolver, and buckled them about the boy's waist. Then, waving his hand, he said, "Go, and the Great Spirit go with you? May His eye look far ahead, and blind your enemies while it makes the trail plain for you to follow."

Buffalo Bill reached out his hand to Dove Eye, who raised it to her lips before she pressed it in a hard-wrung farewell, and then the scout shouted:

"By twos, left turn, and then forward!"

Then, leading the way, with young Overton by his side, the gallant scout dashed off on his back trail at an easy lope, for he did not expect to be able to take the other trail till daylight, and that gait would give him time to get to where Herbeson's party had been attacked, and to feed the one ration of grain which each horse carried, before the day would dawn.

Overton wondered, after they had left the light, how Buffalo Bill at that pace could keep a trail which he could not see. But there was no difficulty at all in it to the scout; he had followed poorer trails in darker nights than that—it was his profession.

CHAPTER XII.

CARTER'S SCHEME.

When the red haired ruffian, fell, and before he could try to battle to prevent it, he found himself bound and gagged, and he lay motionless, though fully conscious, for he believed resistance or a sign of an attempt to free himself would bring instant death, and he was not fool enough to seek it when he could help it.

So he lay still until the three men and his rescued victim had gone back and then, with an exertion of muscular strength which none but men so hardy could exhibit, he literally burst the strong belt which had bound his hands behind him.

So, entirely free with his hands, to finish the work was now but the action of a few seconds.

Then, with a fox-like tread, he ran to aid his companion, but seeing his overthrow, and being himself now without arms, he knew he could do nothing.

So, quickly he ran back, took the horses of the party, and with them rode away as swiftly as he could, taking a route which he knew would throw him on the trail of one of the parties of his gang, leading toward a general rendezvous where they were to unite the next day.

All this he did with a celerity and silence which proved what a complete adept he was in the cunning arts of the warfare of the plains and wilderness.

So when the two hunters, Charlie and Barnett, went to find him, he was out of sight and hearing, and he had even been so cool as to carry off his belt and the bandage which Texas Jack had used over his mouth. He literally left no sign behind him.

The horses he took had been led so long that they were fully rested, and he made fully three or four miles at a run before he held in, for he had fastened one on either side while he rode the one in the center.

Then he halted and listened, but hearing no sound of pursuit, he fastened two of the horses, took a fresh one, and rode directly back—not on his own trail, but on a route which he judged by the stars would take him near the camp where Bill Deekin lay.

For he had thought of a new plan to enable him to so cripple the captors of Bill that they could not get out of his reach before he returned with enough of his gang to "wipe them out" and recover the girls. For he had counted them, and knew there were but three men in the party. Had he been well armed he was desperate enough to have risked a fight with them alone if he could have got the first shot, for he was too much of a brute to know what fear was.

He had himself tethered the horse of Bill Deekin, those rode by the two girls, his own horse, and the strong, fast mule selected for Norfolk Ben, to grass in a hollow some

two hundred yards behind the camp where he and Bill Deekin had arranged to pass a night of terrible carousal—and thus knowing just where to find them, he hoped to get these animals away also, and thus leave the whole party on foot so that it would be an easy task to trail and overtake them when he had got his ruffian band together.

Only too well did he succeed. Tired, hungry, the hunters did not deem it necessary to look after that stock, for the last thought in the world would be that a man mounted on their stock would return to get other animals, so, with an arrangement that one should keep awake, the others lay down to rest and sleep after eating some of the cooked provisions which the outlaws had in camp.

It must have been fully three hours after the escape of their first prisoner, for Barnett was on watch and he had relieved Charlie, when he heard a noise beyond the camp, as if the horses, which they knew were tethered in that direction, were alarmed.

Barnett listened, and muttered something to himself about wolves smelling meat, for he heard the well-imitated snarl of such an animal in the direction of the horses.

Then he heard the horses moving, as if they were free from tethers, and he woke Texas Jack.

"Why in thunder didn't you call me sooner?" cried Texas Jack, as he sprang to his feet, rifle in hand. "There go the horses on a run."

At the same instant a defiant yell, clear as a bugle, came ringing back on the still night air.

"When'll you hold court now?" said Bill Deekin, with a sneer.

"At daylight, if you dare to open your black mouth again," said the hunter, fiercely. Then he added, "You needn't crow because the horses are gone. We shouldn't have used 'em anyway. Here we wait till Buffalo Bill comes up, for he's on my trail, as true as good steel in the hand of a brave man, or virtue in the heart of a good woman. So lay and grunt, you white-livered cuss—lay and grunt till the court is ready to let you slide to eternity."

The horses were now out of hearing, and Texas Jack lighted his pipe to smoke away the rest of the night, mad with himself for having slept at all.

He threw the blanket with a careful hand over the shoulders of the poor girls, for they had moved when the alarm was given, and the night dew was falling chill and heavy.

"We'll have no more trouble to-night, Barnett," he said; "you may just as well start a fire. It is thunderin' chilly."

"Don't build it too near that darky's heels, though," he added, as Barnett stirred up some old embers right against Ben's feet.

"He'd never budge if I used his feet for a back-log," said the hunter, laughing. "They're fire-proof. I saw a fellow once, in war time, with his heels actually singeing, and when every one smelled meat a burning he was the last one in the crowd to know what meat it was."

"Marse white man, dat wasn't dis chile," said Ben, gravely, for he had woke up while they were talking. "I was raised tender, I was—old Marse Herbeson t'ought all de worl' ob me, he did, and dese here honeys wot is sleepin'. Dey're like cherybims—dey can tell you so. I like de fire, but I nebber toasts at it myself, I don't."

"Ben, how did you learn to kick so well?" said Texas Jack. "I never could have kicked out so straight, with both feet tied, as you did when that knife was comin' for me."

"All obserwation, Marse Jack—all obserwation. You see, mules dey kick wid both feet at once, and dey do it wicked, don't dey? I seen dat knife a shinin', and I knew you was a dead coon if ever it drapped on you, so I jes' kicked out straight and heavy."

"Yes, and it saved my life, Ben. I'll try to save yours, and to save the life and honor of these gals, so they can get back safe to their old father."

"Dare fadder? Isn't old Marse Herbeson dead?"

"No; he was alive, though badly wounded, when I left him, and I hope he will live to see his children back. His two sons were killed, though."

"Yes, I know'd dat, Marse Jack and I thought ole marse was gone to glory, too. Oh, if only we does get back to see him alibe, won't dese little pinky-winky gals—won't

dey jess holler glory? Marse Jack, I haven't got nuffin' else to live for but dem. Dey make a heap o' talk about liberty an' all dat, but all de liberty dis chile wants is to see dem live an' grow up like de rose of Sharon an' de green bay tree. Hi!—dat's all."

And Ben rolled over. In a minute more he was snoring like a juvenile thunder-storm.

And now the gray of coming day began to tinge the darkness in the east, and the morning star, so cheering to many a keeper of the midnight watch, rose slowly over the rim of the horizon.

CHAPTER XIII.

TEXAS JACK'S SIGNALS.

The wisdom of leaving the tent at the Herbeson camp still standing was evident as Buffalo Bill approached the spot, for it was visible a considerable distance, so that they could approach it at a gallop, and it marked the starting point of the enemy whom they were to follow.

Moreover in it they found two bags of excellent grain, which had formed the pillows to the bed where the girls slept, and from this the horses of the party had an excellent feed, thus saving the single ration they carried for another feed to give them continued strength, which they could not get from the yet scanty growth of grass.

Buffalo Bill had the horses all unbridled and fed heartily here, for when day dawned so he could see the trail, he meant to ride at a swift lope, and thus to so gain on those he pursued as to overtake Texas Jack by or before night if it were a possible thing.

For he argued that Jack would not so push the ruffians as to hurry them, and that they had camped early, and very likely, not deeming themselves pursued, would start lazily in the morning.

He made all his men lie down to rest while the horses fed, but he would not sleep himself, and Overton could not. So those two stood watch—the first from a habit which has enabled him to go three days and nights in a time of peril without sleeping; the other because the life was so new, so wild, so exciting that he could not get sleepy.

The two walked to and fro to keep warm, talking about the "fast times" and faster men in New York, and the beauties that had seen and almost adored Buffalo Bill, despite their knowledge that he was wedded to a living angel far away.

Then, with horses and men well refreshed, and the last better still by a cup of hot coffee and a bite of cold bread and meat, the cry of "boots and saddles, mount, men, mount away!" left our hero's lips.

Just as day broke, cold and clear, they took the well-defined rail. Four or five hundred yards on they came to the spot where Texas Jack, coming from the column, had struck it, and now they swept forward at a gallop, for it was as plain as a paved street to him who led the way.

For miles no word was spoken, for in such marches talk is superfluous and the eyes do all that is needed outside the horse one rides.

Before ten o'clock they were at the stream where the renegades halted at noon the day before, and here Buffalo Bill saw the tracks of the girls' feet where they had stood in the sand when lifted from the horses.

Near by, where Texas Jack had watered his horses, the scout found an arrow cut in a tree, pointing to a knot-hole, or hollow, a little way up.

Bill put his hand in that and drew out a crumpled leaf from Jack's memorandum book, on which, written in pencil, he found these words:

"Boss:—I'm hard after the cusses. The gals haven't come to no harm yet, for I've been in sight all day, and by help from where help ought to come, I'll keep 'em lively till they camp, and then—I'll do the best I know how. I'll save them gals, if I can, or go under a tryin'. Hurry up, for I'm thinkin' I'll want you bad afore long."

"Yours to the hilt,

"Now and always,

JACK."

"He is a noble fellow—his like can't be matched this side of the Mississippi," said Buffalo Bill, as he thrust the note into his haversack.

The horses were given a few moments to breathe, and then, when cool enough, were watered freely in the stream into which they were ridden girth deep.

Then, once more in column of twos, the party dashed on as fast as ever.

Soon Buffalo Bill saw they were coming into a hard trailing country—rocky ridges and spots where an unshod horse would hardly leave a hoof-mark. But here the shirt of Texas Jack began its mission, and every little way as they rode swiftly on a white remnant of rag hanging from a bush told of the forethought of the hunter and kept them at ease on the trail without having to lessen speed to look for it.

"Didn't I tell you Jack was a jewel?" cried Buffalo Bill, as he pointed out these signals to Overton. "And you and Uncle Ned will believe me next winter when you get buffalo hump, ribs, and elk steak till you're sick of paying express on it, for he is a king on the hunt. The Grand Duke Alexis thought he was big on the shoot. Why, Texas Jack would go into a buffalo herd blindfolded and kill two to the duke's one, just by feel and hearing."

Overton didn't say much. They had come fully sixty miles since they had left Spotted Tail's camp, and it wasn't quite as easy work as taking a ride in Central Park.

But he stood it nobly, his strong will bearing up against the fatigue, and when Buffalo Bill asked him if he hadn't brought a flask along to keep up his spirits with he made this reply:

"No, Bill; when Uncle Ned told me you had quit the use of strong drink entirely, I made up my mind that if you could stand it I could, and never since have I touched or tasted even a glass of wine."

Here Buffalo Bill pointed to the cast-off-horse-shoes, which Texas Jack saw the night before.

"Them rascals are sharp," he said. "Now Jack's hard work is to come, for it was sure dark when he got here, though it isn't noon, or only about noon now. If they weren't in sight when they got here Jack has lost 'em, for I can see they're getting ready to scatter. They wouldn't have cared about them shoes if they had intended to keep together."

"Ride on, ride on!" said Overton, eagerly. "We must be near them."

Bill made no reply, but he waved his hand as he again took the lead.

Aided by the strips of white, continually dropped by Jack in this march, the party were able to keep the trail, though it was now but one of a dozen, all leading different ways.

"There is no knowing now whether Jack is right or not," said Buffalo Bill, "for even I would be at fault here, and I'm older in trackin' than he is."

Again they rode on for some time in silence.

Suddenly Bill came to another halt. His quick eye had detected a new kind of material in the signals.

"A bit of a girl's handkerchief, with some letters on it written in blood," said he. "Jack is on the right track, and one of the girls has left a handkerchief for a sign. Maybe news written on it, too. We're in luck, for if they are cool enough to do that they are still free from great harm. Come on boys, come on."

And again he struck a lope.

Suddenly he halted, but it was for an instant only.

Firing was distinctly heard ahead, and it did not seem a mile away.

"Unslung your guns, look to all your arms, and charge!" thundered Buffalo Bill, and away he rode as fast as his horse could run.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO THE RESCUE.

When Buffalo Bill rode away from the camp of Spotted Tail after the feast was over Dove Eye stood and looked long and lingeringly upon the departing column.

When they were entirely out of sight a sigh broke from her lips—a sigh which shook her form from head to foot.

Her father, standing near her, heard it, and he said:

"Why is the heart of my child so heavy? Her sigh

comes like the moan of the winter wind over the dead grass on the plains."

"Long Rifle has gone on the trail of his enemies. He has gone with few men behind him. He is a great brave, but he may be killed, and then—then Dove Eye's heart will die, too."

"It is well, if it is the will of the Great Spirit, for He does no wrong," said the chief. "Now let Dove Eye go in and sleep. I have a talk to hold with my chiefs, for we must go now to the lands on the Big Horn, where none but our own tribe will be allowed to come."

"I go," said Dove Eye, and she entered her lodge.

The chief went to a great council tent, and soon the tom tom, or the Prophet's drum was heard, drawing together the head men of the tribe.

The council was held late—or rather until an early hour, for the morning star was coming up when the chiefs came out from the council tent, grave and still.

Then suddenly a wild scream was heard from the lodge where Dove Eye slept, and her father and his braves rushed thither to aid her if she was in danger, Spotted Tail snatching a blazing brand from the fire as he passed.

Dove Eye was already out in the open air fronting the lodge, her robe wrapped modestly about her, when they rushed to where she stood.

"Why did Dove Eye cry out? Who has dared to harm the heart of Spotted Tail?" cried the chief, looking on her face white with terror, her eyes swimming in tears.

"The Great Spirit has been in my lodge and spoken to me in a dream," she answered. "Long Rifle is in great danger. He is surrounded by enemies. He is hemmed in on every side. He has called on Dove Eye for help. He said bring twenty braves of the Sioux, or I shall go down into the river of death and rise no more. Dove Eye must go. Who will go with her. Do not all speak—there must be twenty, no more—no less."

"Spotted Tail will go with all his tribe," cried the chief. "Long Rifle shall not cry for help and I stand still."

"No—no! The Dream Angel said that only I and twenty braves should go," cried Dove Eye.

"Then it must be so," said the old chief, sadly. "The Dream Angel is sent by the Great Spirit. Who will go with the Lodge Queen of Spotted Tail?"

In an instant there was a great outcry, for every chief, brave, and warrior, wished to be of the party.

Dove Eye soon settled it. There were forty in front of her, and putting her hand out, she pointed to and called every other one as they stood, by name.

"Get ready, with arms and meat at your backs, for a long, swift ride. You will have no time to hunt," she said. "Be quick—before the sun looks up from its cradle in the waters, we must go."

She turned quickly into the lodge to make her preparations, while Spotted Tail went out to select the best horse in all his band for her to ride.

The braves had not long to wait.

Dove Eye came forth, dressed almost like Kionee the Creeper, in hunting shirt and trousers, carrying a short rifle in her hand, a pistol and knife in her belt, ammunition by her side.

She kissed the hand of her father, then at a bound leaped astride of the wild horse, waved her hand as a signal for all to follow, and without a word sped away upon the trail of him whom she so wildly, hopelessly loved.

CHAPTER XV.

RAPID PURSUIT.

We left Texas Jack, with one of his hunters on watch, waiting for day and Buffalo Bill to come.

The first was soon at hand. And when it came, bright and clear, a warm meal was cooked at the fire, and the sisters, with those who rescued them, ate heartily, for the first had not tasted food all the day before.

Ben was in his glory, cooking and talking, for Barnett had shot an antelope close to camp, and the fat juicy ribs were delicious when broiled over the red coals.

After the rest were all done Ben included, food was placed before Bill Deekin, and the only hand he could use

loosened so that he could help himself. He did this, and eat ravenously, like the half savage beast that he was, and when satisfied, he looked around as if he would like to do something else.

But his feet were tied closely together by thongs wound around his ankles, and he dared not attempt to untie them, for he knew the "court" would enter judgment and order execution very suddenly if he did.

Texas Jack saw his uneasiness, when he retied his well hand to a belt at his back, and said:

"You might as well take things easy, old sinner. You can't budge."

"Take thing easy with this bone a-gratin' every time I move," said the ruffian, looking at his broken arm.

"It will not grate if you don't move it. So keep still. You don't deserve to live one minute, and you shouldn't if I didn't want your case done up Nebraska style. Buffalo Bill, you see, is a army captain, chief of scouts, sheriff and judge, all biled down into one, and he'll send you off accordin' to Hoyle. So I'll keep you till he comes."

"Somebody else may get here ahead of him. Carter won't stop at the mere gettin' away of all your horses. He is the keenest cuss that ever raised a rifle to cover his man before he asked him to stop. He'll not leave me here to suffer. Bet your last dollar on that."

"He's a fool if he don't," said Texas Jack. "But we'll take the chances. I've had to do that all my life, and I guess I shall till I go under. There'll be a poor showin' for you if this Carter and your gang does come back. You'll eat lead the first one."

"I don't care. I've looked death too often in the face to be afeard of it. I don't know but 'twould be a relief, seein' how this arm twinges."

"You deserve to suffer. Look at those poor girls, their brothers dead and scalped, and maybe their father dead by this time. And that the least of the wrongs you meant for them."

For the first time since he had been wounded and taken, Bill Deekin did look ashamed when he heard the girls sobbing as they thought of the dear brothers who died defending them.

"'Twas rough," he muttered. "But when the devil starts one on his road it's all down hill, and nary brake to put on. Don't say no more about them."

"I'm glad to see you've a little feelin' left. It won't set you back with the court," said Jack.

Then he sent Charlie out to a sand hill not far off as a picket to keep guard, while he and Barnett got together the captured arms, saw into their fitness for use, and made all ready for defense if they should be attacked before Buffalo Bill came in.

"Ben, can you shoot?" he asked, as he looked at the spare rifles—two in number—with four good revolvers.

"Shoot, Marse Jack? Shoot? You jess bet I kin. Let me try on him jess once, an' ef I don't make daylight shine clear froo him jess mark me down an ole liar."

And Ben pointed to Bill Deekin, who looked as if he would like to roast Ben then and there.

"'Twould be a good idea," said Jack, thoughtfully. "He isn't fit to die by a good white man's hand. Hardly fit to die by yours. But when the court is ready to have him go you shall have the send-off, Ben."

"Thank you, Marse Jack—thank you. Hope 'twill be soon."

Jack now talked to the girls to try and cheer up, while Ben rolled over and went to sleep face down.

Barnett watched the outlaw, for the latter lying like a crippled bear, rolled his eyes from side to side, looking hate and mischief all the time.

Thus matters went in the camp until noontime went by. No one seeming hungry nothing more was cooked.

Just after the sun had canted westward of the meridian line Texas Jack shouldered his rifle and went to a ridge a little to the right of the camp, from which he thought he could look back over his trail, hoping to catch a sight of Buffalo Bill coming.

But he saw a different sight, and one which brought all the man of his noble nature into instant use.

It was a large body of horsemen—he knew they were not Indians by the way they rode, though they were dressed and painted as such. These men were heading,

on sweeping gallop, directly for the camp, but coming in behind the ridge, so that Charlie, the sentinel, had not yet seen them.

Jack knew there was not a second to lose. The men were within half a mile, and firing his rifle to call Charlie in, he rushed back to the camp.

"Gals, lay low!" he cried. "The hounds are a comin'! Lay low by them bushes. We'll give 'em all they ask for, and more, too."

By this time Charlie was in, and Ben, wide awake, had a revolver in the waistband of his trousers and a rifle in his hand.

A yell and cheer were heard, and Bill Deekin, wild with the thought of rescue, yelled back as loud as he could.

"Ben, just stop that crow from croaking," said Texas Jack, coolly. "The court decides that he be shot."

Ben had literally itched for the chance.

"Dar's one for Miss Susie," he said, as he fired a shot from his revolver directly into the mouth of the wretch as he opened it to give another yell, "and dar's another for Miss Lottie, and one for me," he added, as he completely shattered his head with two more shots.

"Hold on! don't fire away all your ammunition on dead game," cried Texas Jack, as Ben seemed intent on riddling the quivering carcass. "We'll need every load now."

"He's done dead anyhow! Glory for dis once!" cried Ben. But the next second he had something besides talking to do.

The full band, with Carter at its head, came sweeping over the ridge, and scattered in line, so that the shots would have less chance, they poured down on the little camp.

Texas Jack and his mates poured in a volley, which was answered by a shower of shots—poor Charlie falling dead in his tracks, while Barnett sank back shot through his best arm, and with a ball that, grazing his temple, stunned him for the time.

The next moment they were in—the ruffians, I mean—and it was for a second a hand-to-hand affair, with only Ben and Texas Jack to keep it up.

Ben was knocked down by a plunging horse; Jack received a blow from the breech of a gun which staggered him, and then, as another sent him to the ground, he heard the cry of the red-haired leader:

"Take up the gals and leave, there's help comin'—take up the gals, and leave."

He tried to rise—did rise, raised his last revolver and fired at the red-haired villain just as he saw him lifting Lottie to his horse.

He saw the wretch reel—he knew he had hit him; then he fell himself, for he was struck by another ball, his third wound in the fight.

Half an hour later Buffalo Bill was on the ground by his side, raising his head and putting a canteen of water to his lips.

"Lively work here, boss!" he murmured. "Lively work—you bet. I wish you'd been half an hour sooner. Did they get the gals?"

"Yes—but they shall not keep them. They are off now, but I'll follow 'em to where they belong, and I'll rescue the girls and wipe out them disgraces of humanity. Poor Charlie is done for, and Barnett badly hurt—and you—"

"Never mind me, boss; I'll be square in half an hour. Just stuff a handkerchief or a bit of your shirt in this hole. I used my shirt all up last night."

"De Lor'—I've been in star-land! Whar's de missuses?" cried Ben, coming to. "Oh, whar's de cherrybims?"

"Who is this?" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Norfolk Ben—a servant to the old man we found. He is game—he fought like a tiger by my side after he'd killed that cuss, Bill Deekin, the captain of the gang, that I took last night. But, boss, there's no time to talk. You've got spare horsse there—us three are not so hurt we can't ride—our horses were all stole last night. Put us in the saddle—tie us there, and put us after the hounds that has the gals. I put a ball into the red-headed cuss who seemed to boss 'em, but I was dizzy—I couldn't shoot straight. You've a stranger with you."

"Yes, Jack; this is Mr. Overton and he is true grit. He is a city man, but he rides like one of us, and won't say tire while there's game ahead. He is the one I told you

of, that you're to hunt for next winter, if we're spared."

"Yes? I'm glad to see him. You told me heap about him. I'm glad to see him, and these blue-jackets, too. We'll need 'em all. How many of them cusses have we laid out—look over toward the ridge?"

Buffalo Bill did so, and found six dead white men, disguised as Indians, and another so near dead that killing him was a mercy.

Then when Texas Jack, cheered by this news, was got into the saddle, and Barnett and Ben also mounted, the column again got in motion, stopping at the water close by only long enough to water their horses, and then following the trail of the ruffians who had fled toward a range of hills in a westerly course, they rode on as swift as they could and yet keep their horses in wind. The extra horses, for their heaviest men to change, now came in play, and Buffalo Bill felt sure he would overtake those he followed.

But if he could not do it before dark he knew it would be almost impossible to continue the chase till daylight came again, for the country grew more and more rough as they rode on.

"What do you think of this kind of life, Overton?" asked Bill, as he dashed on with that gentleman by his side.

"I like it—it is wild and exciting beyond all my dreams. But the next time I come I'll bring a quilted saddle," said the amateur, with rather a forced smile.

"You'll get callous by and by," said Bill, laughing. "I wish we'd got into that fight. You'd have heard bullets whistle."

"I reckon we'll hear enough of them before we're out of the wilderness," said Overton. "You don't think I'll be afraid, do you?"

"No; I know you won't," said Bill, quietly. "I watched your eyes while we were riding in, when we heard the firing, and there was never a wink of fear in 'em. You're a bully boy, if you do come from the city. You're like little Johnny Hecksher—git up and git from the start, but it's git ahead. We're on a gain. I can see the grass just a straightenin' that they've trod down. Oh, if we can but get in gun-shot before dark they'll know what's what."

"Aren't they owardly? They must be three to our one at least," said Overton.

"Rascals always are cowards when they're started," said the scout. "Their guilt is like a spear—it pricks 'em cruel. They're nearer five to our one than any less. But we've right on our side, and, tossin' the poetry of the thing to the wind, right is right, and I know it. I never get into a fight when I meet a bad crowd in the border towns, for them that make musses know me. But sometimes, when they're smashing up things, and hurting people they've no business to meddle with, I walk in and say 'go!' They generally go without my having to lift a hand."

All this and more was said while Buffalo Bill and Overton rode side by side at a sweeping gallop—the rest of the party following in silence.

Kionee the Creeper, ever still, but with his keen, black eye continually alert, rode as he had done from the start, next to Buffalo Bill, his two ponies swift and as enduring as himself, keeping up with ease.

It was now nearly night, and the trail of the fugitives was so fresh that when they came to a stream Buffalo Bill showed Overton the water yet dripping from the rocks where the horses of the pursued had clambered up the bank.

CHAPTER XVI.

STAKED-DOWN CANON.

When Carter, the former lieutenant, but now leader of the ruffian band—a conglomeration of wretches run out from the railroad towns by various vigilance committees—saw the party headed by Buffalo Bill sweeping down on him, he did not know their numbers, or he would have stood his ground and fought.

But he heard the rinign cheer, he saw the buckskin of the scouts and the blue of soldiers' uniforms, and with only one thought—the girls should not be left behind—he gave orders to secure them, mount and retreat.

While in the act of lifting Lottie to his own horse he received a bad, but not an entirely disabling wound, from the pistol of Texas Jack, and he had to resign the care of the girl to another. But he shouted, so all could hear, when he dashed off:

"Remember, them gals are my property. The man who raises a hand to 'em till I say the word, except to keep 'em in our company, fights me. I'm a little hurt, but I'm good for a half dozen of you yet. Follow me, and I'll get you out of this scrape, as I have out of fifty before. If old Bill Deekin hadn't been too cussed lazy to keep a lookout while I was busy, he'd be alive and your cap'n yet, instead of havin' the top of his head blown off, as I saw it back there."

"You're ten to one a better cap'n than he ever was. Three cheers for Snap Carter!" shouted one of the ruffians.

"I go that and three better!" cried Hort Grizzle.

"I see you and a yell," said Hunker Ben, and the wretches gave a cheer which made the ears of the wretched captive girls tingle as they were forced forward in the rapid rush.

"That's noise enough, boys. Save your wind till it is needed," cried Snap Carter. "Them scouts and blue coats are started again. If we can make the hills at the head of Lodge Pole by dark we are safe; if we can't we'll have to stop at some good point and fight it out."

"We can fight 'em better in the hills. I know every crook and turn there," cried Hort Grizzle.

"No better than I do," said Snap, who while he rode had managed to bandage his wound. "Give me your canteen, Hunker Ben. I'm not much on whisky, but this lettin' of blood weakens me."

"There isn't much in it. Bill Deekin got one pull at it afore we parted last night, and you know a quart didn't go far with him," said Ben.

Then the canteen was passed over, and Snap Carter took the little that was left.

It revived him somewhat, and he turned to look at the two girls who had once more fallen into his power.

"You've found out that there's more than one slip between the cup and the lip, haven't you, my beauty?" he said, with a fiendish sneer on his bad face, addressing Lottie.

"I have found out that God is just and great. Your partner in crime is dead, and you will follow him," said the heroic girl.

"Not till I've broke your proud spirit, you pretty vixen," said the wretch. "As for your sister there, I'll show her that I'm a thousand times worse than ever Bill Deekin was. He was a white-livered cuss anyway, more fit to drive a peddler's cart than to head a band like this. He'd faint if he heard a woman whine, but I'll show you a grinning face while you shed tears of blood. You've found a devil in me, you have!"

"You never spoke a truer word, Snap Carter—if that is your name."

"It is my name, my little Canada thistle, and your's will be Carter, too. Hallo, Tom, what's up?"

The last words were addressed to a man left to ride a quarter of a mile in the rear with two others as a rear guard.

"Them chaps are a gainin' on us fast—they're not more than a mile behind my mates," said the man.

"Have you had a chance to count 'em?"

"Yes. There are nineteen, all told—if I can count straight."

"How many scouts—for they're worse than the Boys in Blue."

"All but six are scouts, I think. There's one Injun."

"And we're fifty-two men—not one got a scratch but me. Boys, I'm not goin' to run much farther. If we can't wipe out a crowd of that size, it's time we left the plains and took to petty larceny in the cities. We are almost three to their one, and if we're cool, can get the first shot."

"Hadn't we better wait till we get to the Staked-down Canon?" asked Hort Grizzle. "We could hold that agin a thousand men—let alone nineteen."

"The Staked-down Canon—where's that?" cried Snap Carter.

"I thought you said you knew all about this country," said Hort, glad to get even with a man he didn't like—on at least one point.

"So I do," said Carter, angrily.

"Not much, if you don't know that place, and how it got its name."

"What kind of a place is it?"

"Why, it's so deep betwixt rock and rock on either side the sun never gets down to shine in it. You can find ice there the year round. And it winds on through the hills for two miles afore it opens on a rolling country beyond. In the spring, when 'tisin't dry, a stream comes tumblin' through as noisy as a gang of wolves over a dead buffalo. And I've seen it as white as a river of soap-suds. There we could pick our ground, and fight for a year if we had grub."

"What gave it its name, since you seem to know all about it?" asked Carter, still riding on faster than ever.

"Why, a chap you've heard tell of—Swankey Snaggs chased the chap that ran off with his gal to there. He caught 'em in camp, asleep. He tied 'em both afore they knew he was thar; then he give the gal time to pray, and then he just blowed the whole top of her head clean off, right afore the other feller's face. But he hadn't hardly begun his deviltry yet. He let the feller see him kill the gal, and then he tossed her into the drink. Then he went with his hatchet and he cut four stout stakes. He sharpened 'em to a point, and then he untied the chap's hands and staked 'em down to the ground, right through the palms; then he drove the other stakes through his feet the same way. And there he kept him, eating, drinking, and sleeping alongside of him, till he died—and it took the cuss a week to go off the hooks. That's how the place got its name."

"It's just the place for us to halt in," said Snap Carter. Then, turning to the rear guard he said:

"Wait here till your men come up; then watch the chaps behind us close up. Get a shot, if you can, to drop the headmost and keep 'em back. When I'm in the right spot ahead, I'll fire three shots, one after the other, and you come in quick. Hail us as you come, so we'll know, for it'll be dark in a little while."

The rear guard halted for his mates to come up, while the main body swept forward, with Hort Grizzle in advance as guide.

The country grew wilder and wilder as they rode on, and more and more gloomy, for the shades of coming night were deepening fast.

The poor girls, shocked at the terrible story they had been forced to hear, dreading lest these who were coming to their rescue should all be slain, shuddered with new terrors and undefined fears.

Both wept in silence, for hope seemed to go further and further from their sight as they were hurried on.

Soon they heard the dash of water, and in the gathering gloom saw that they were entering a dark and gloomy gorge between two enormous cliffs.

"Here's the Staked-down Canon! What do you think of it?" shouted Hort Grizzle, as he still kept on.

"It's just the place for a fight," cried Snap Carter—having to hallo to be heard above the roar of a waterfall near by. "How much farther are you goin'?"

"Only a little ways, to where Snaggs staked the fellow down. It's stiller in there, and just around a bend where we can take them that follows at a double advantage," answered the ruffian.

"All right, Hort, but it'll soon be dark."

"I know it, but there's a cave where we'll halt, and we can build a fire in there, and there'll be no light out for them to see where to shoot. I reckon Snaggs chose that place 'cause the water runs deep and still, and he could hear his feller groan better when he was a dyin'. Oh, it's a bully old place, you bet, for such fun as we'll have. Hey?"

Only a couple of minutes more of riding and then Hort Grizzle, turning a sharp angle of the rock, shouted:

"Here we are! This is the spot, cap'n. How d'ye like it?"

"First rate—it is just the place. Light up in the cavern you told of, and stow the gals there. Hunker Ben, you guard 'em, and don't let a man go nigh 'em. They're my game, and I'll tame 'em when I can get time."

The ruffian leader now drew a revolver, and raising it in

the air, fired three shots in succession, and then turning, he ordered his men to dismount, fasten their horses, and to stand to arms.

"We'll soon hear where the fools are that have been losing time chasing us," he cried.

At the same moment a fire flashed up in a deep cavern in the side of the cliff, and by it he saw the two girls, guarded by Hunker Ben standing pallid and wretched in the gloomy place.

He laughed in his fiendish glee, as he thought that they were now utterly helpless in his power, for he felt secure in this natural stronghold.

A minute later, and answering the hail of his men, the three men of the rear guard galloped in.

"Where are the scouts and the Boys in Blue?" cried Snap Carter.

"Close behind, cap—close behind!" cried the leader of the three. "I fired on 'em twice, and got a ball through my hat from that cuss, Buffalo Bill."

"Ready, men! Ready!" shouted Snap Carter.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S TACTICS.

"We're closing fast—I saw one of the scoundrels just now," cried Buffalo Bill, in high glee, as he approached the hills. "If we can only get 'em before they get into a canon there that I know of we can have a fair, square fight. If they get there first we'll have all we know to get them out or do anything with them. Old Bridger, and Jim Beckwith, and me found it out about ten years ago. There was a gang of Ogallala in chase of us, and we got in there. We gave 'em hail Columbia, and made 'em the sickest lot of reds you ever saw. Hallo! how is that for high?"

A bullet whistled so close to the head of Overton that he couldn't help dodging, though the ball had gone by.

"They are shooting, aren't they?" said Overton, so innocently that Buffalo Bill laughed.

But a couple of balls more, so near his own head that the scout knew he was the mark, roused his temper, and, balancing his "long-range" rifle ready for use, he said:

"If that rooster stoops to shoot again I'll cut his comb."

And the words hardly left his mouth before he saw him again raise to fire.

Bill fired at the same moment, and as the ball left his gun, he felt the hat flying from his own head, but caught it in his hand.

"The mean wretch!" he muttered. "There's two holes through the hat. What a shame. 'Twas the best sombrero I've worn in ten years."

"It is only ventilated," said Overton. "That is a fashion we have in the city."

"Keep cool and still now—we're coming to the canon," said Bill. "Steady in the rear—steady. We've work before us. Be all ready to dismount and take cover."

They were just entering the dark gorge, when far away up in the dark gloom they heard three shots.

"Those are signals," said Buffalo Bill, halting his men by a wave of the hand as he checked Powder Face by a word. "The advance is posted and the rear guard is called in. We've got to feel our way."

It was now dark. He rode into the gorge a couple of hundred yards in silence, and then dismounted, passing the word for the rest to do the same.

The horses were now led up and tied head to head so a single man could take care of them, and then the brave scout gave his orders.

He held no consultation, for he knew the ground, and no one knew better how to fight on it. But his first thought was whom he could use, and next how he could best save those whom he must use.

He wanted Texas Jack to stay with the horses, for he was yet weak from his wounds, though not disabled. But the heroic hunter would not listen to this. If there was a fight, and he knew there must be, he was in for it, and would be if he knew it would be his last. Barnett, though only able to shoot left-handed with his revolvers, would not hang back.

Even the Indian boy, Kionee the Creeper, refused to stay behind, for he said:

"Dove Eye bade me go close to Long Rifle and not to leave him."

"Overton, I reckon I'll have to leave you as a horse-guard," said Buffalo Bill at last to his friend.

"Don't talk to me!" said Overton, impatiently. "As to my playing horse-guard here, it isn't on the bills. Where you go in this fight I'm going. That's as good as sworn to."

"I never did see fellows so anxious to have blood let as you all are," said Bill, laughing. "I'll have to use my authority. Corporal," said he to the non-commissioned officer in the cavalry escort, "select one of your men to take charge of the horses, while we creep forward and engage."

The corporal selected the man, who had to obey orders, and then Buffalo Bill gave his final instructions.

Each man, following as close to him as possible was to keep close to the rocks on the right. If a shot was fired from ahead or a hail heard, they were to drop low, and only to fire when they could see by the flashes of guns where the enemy was massed. If Buffalo Bill saw a chance for a rush, and the enemy had any fire built by which they could be recognized, all were to charge and to do their level best to "wipe out" or destroy the crowd and rescue the captives.

All matters settled, and orders understood, the scout crept forward. For at least six hundred yards, past the noisy waterfall, and until he was near the sharp bend in the canon, he went without interruption, or hearing any sound to tell him they had halted.

"They've gone through, haven't they?" whispered Overton.

"Hush! See there!" said Bill, as he pointed to a glimmering reflection on the water to their left, made by the fire in the cavern. On this reflection, dim and faint, but visible to such eyes as the scout had, could be seen dark marks, the shadows of men standing between the fire and the water.

Buffalo Bill now waited till his men were all up, so they could touch each other.

Then, whispering to all, even Overton and Kionee, not to move he crept so far that his head turned the angle of the rock. As he did so he accidentally knocked a stone from the cliff that he touched.

In a second a volley of balls whistled by where he had been, for he drew back too quickly for them to harm him.

"They're there in a body, and well posted," he whispered. "I don't see what we can do before daylight. Then we can pick some of 'em and maybe make a charge. To do it now would be madness. But we're as safe here as they are there, and I don't know but safer, for we've got water where it'll show their shadows, and not ours. We'll stick it out till daylight."

"You will, eh?" said a sneering voice, so close around the turn that Buffalo Bill knew he had been overheard. "Well, take it easy till then, for it is the last rest you'll get."

Bill did not reply. He is not in the habit of wasting words, especially when in a tight place. Even breath is worth something then. He drew back a very little and bade the rest, in a whisper, not to sleep, but to take easy positions and wait. He would let them know when it was time to work.

Little did he dream of the plan at that moment forming for his destruction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LABOR LOST.

It was Snap Carter himself who had overheard Buffalo Bill whispering to his followers, and who answered him. He hoped in doing it to provoke the scout and his party to make a rush, for he had every gun so pointed in his party that it would have swept the ranks of those who attacked him.

Failing to provoke a charge, not daring to try it himself, another idea entered his brain, so fertile in wickedness. He went to the rear, where Hort Grizzle stood, and asked him in a low tone if he knew any way by which the

rear of the party of their assailants could be approached before daylight.

"Yes," said Hort. "I can get there in two hours or less. There is another canon below here that I can get to the rear through."

"So as to stampede their horses?"

"Ay, or better yet to hem them in and wipe 'em out entirely. You know how narrow the gorge is where we entered, and that for fully two hundred yards it is straight as a bee-line before it makes a turn."

"Yes, I remember that."

"Then how easy it would be with the loose rocks at the mouth of the canon, to wall up a good breastwork, too high for their animals to cross, and from behind it, with ten or a dozen men to sweep them down if they tried to charge out of the straight, narrow pass."

"That's so. Hort, if you'll try it with ten or even twelve men, and succeed, you shall be second in command of the gang."

"That's good, but not good enough, Snap Carter. If I try I'll do the job up to the handle, and you know it."

"Well, what do you want?"

"That oldest gal. One ought to satisfy you."

"Well, I'll say this—if you cut off their retreat, and we together wipe them out, you shall have the girl for a wife, and be second in command. Does that suit you?"

"It does; give me your hand on it."

"There it is. Bad as I am, you never knew me to go back on my word."

"That's so, Snap Carter. Now, creep up and pick me ten good men, without any noise, and send 'em here, telling them they're to obey my orders. I'll have to take horses, for we've a ten-mile ride all the way round. Remember, tell the fellows they're to do just what I say. Then, when daylight comes, you pick 'em off this side, and I'll do it from the other. If I was you I'd fit up a breastwork here so they can't charge if they get too desperate, and we can thin 'em down then without risk of any loss on our side."

"The idea is good, Hort. There is more in you than I thought there was."

"Glad you've found it out at last, cap. But we'll be friends now and work together. See that the gal is kept safe till we're together again."

"Ay, rest easy on that," said Carter. "Now, I'll send you the men, and then I'll carry out your breastwork idea."

"That's right; the noise you make will keep them from hearing me. Hurry up the men."

Ten minutes later Hort Grizzle was moving west out of the canon, with ten of the smartest desperadoes in the band under his command.

Then, keeping a portion of his men ready to fire if any attempt was made to interrupt him, Snap Carter commenced building a breastwork just beyond the turn in the canon.

"That just suits me," said Buffalo Bill, when he heard them at work. "It sounds as if they meant to stay and fight, and if that is their game we'll whip 'em sure before we're through. I had a gang just like these to tackle once when I was on the Overland for old Ben Holliday. They got fixed just right, they thought, and they didn't fight worth talking about when they did get ready. We went right over a pile of logs they'd built up in front, and they never staid for us to cut 'em up. They went like sheep with a gang of wolves after them. When daylight comes we'll show 'em what we're about. Our breastworks will be lead and steel."

"I wish it were daylight," said Overton. "I hate to wait this way. It is like getting a cold dinner when you've had to wait for it till the hunger is all over."

"Keep cool," said Bill, quietly.

"I'd like to see anybody do anything else on these damp rocks."

Bill laughed in his low, quiet way. He liked humor at any time, but especially in a green hand, when a fight might come on at any minute. It showed him that a man who could joke then could fight at any time.

All was now still and quiet for a time, though they were very busy in front for an hour or two.

"Isn't it an awful long night?" asked Overton, at last. "I begin to feel sleepy."

"The night isn't any longer than it was last night, but we were riding a little faster," said Bill. "But it'll end by and by, as we said at the last ball; but it will be about the time that did—at daylight."

"I think I'll take a smoke," said Overton, and a cigar and match came from his pocket together.

Bill snatched both and tossed them a dozen yards away.

"Would you draw a bullet to your head or heart by showing a light here?" cried the scout. "Why, man, you'd be riddled if they only got a glimpse of fire."

"I didn't think of that," said Overton. "But I see you are right."

"You'll have to keep thinking while you're in front of these chaps," said Bill. "They're a hard set, but I've had to deal with as bad or worse. There is one thing I like. They are not abusing the women, or we would hear it. If they were, I'd go in if I knew I'd go under—I'd go in and kill the girls if I couldn't get 'em away, for 'twould be better for 'em to be dead than alive."

Word now came up the line that the man with the horses wanted to see Buffalo Bill.

"I don't like to leave my post," said the scout. "But you stay right where you are, Overton. Texas Jack is next. He knows what to do."

The scout slipped back and soon reached the place where the horses were fastened.

"I can hardly keep your horse still, sir; he wants to face the rear," said the soldier. "I think there is something up there—I've heard noises, singular noises, two or three times."

"Powder Face is sure to know it if there's danger in the wind," said Buffalo Bill. "Maybe they left a squad out there to cut off our retreat. If they did it is all lost trouble. I don't intend to retreat. I've studied army tactics under Sheridan, and he doesn't use the maneuver. I shall go forward when day dawns."

"That will be soon. There is gray in the east now," said the sentinel.

"True—enough for me to look back a ways and see if there is really a gang in our rear."

Buffalo Bill crept along under the edge of the cliff a short distance, until he became satisfied that there was a party in his rear, and that they had built a breastwork to cut him off in that direction.

"It is all labor lost," he said, as he passed the sentinel. "Stand by your horses till we need them to advance."

CHAPTER XIX.

LONG RIFLE IN BATTLE.

When Dove Eye left the camp of her father with twenty of his noblest warriors—Red Leaf, the sub-chief, being the leader, but himself for once yielding to the will of woman, and looking on Dove Eye as his superior—the dawn was just breaking.

Letting her horse have a free rein, on she swept, her eyes upon the trail left by Buffalo Bill, and the gait was never broken until they reached the spot where the tent of the Herbesons yet stood.

Here she paused a few moments to let the horses breathe and take water, then the race against time was renewed and kept up until they reached the noon stopping-place of the renegades on the day after the massacre. Here again the horses were allowed a little time to nip the grass until they were cool enough to water.

To Dove Eye it seemed as if the time spent was time lost, and it was almost an hour, but the horses went on with new vigor again afterward, and though night was creeping on, they had gained fast upon the hero of her heart and his party.

They were at the spot where Texas Jack had so gallantly battled with immense odds, while the sun was yet an hour high.

Here she saw the marks of the conflict, the yet unburied dead, but one only, Charlie, the hunter, having been covered, and he had a blanket, and a pile of brush laid over him, and she knew that Long Rifle had had one fight, and in it had been victorious.

She recognized the body of Charlie, as one of his friends,

and she made her warriors bury it with their knives and hands in a shallow grave, covering that with heavy stones to keep the wolves from mangling the body.

Then, her horses again rested, she mounted and rode on, but soon it grew dark so she could not keep the trail, and then Red Leaf, the best trailer in the tribe, took the lead.

He followed it with unerring skill until they got into the rough country, never slacking his speed till then, but now he was obliged often to leave his horse and look for or feel for the tracks of those who had gone on ahead.

A last, from the general course taken, he felt certain that they would take the pass through the hills, known to him as the "Pass of the Bad Spirit," but already described in this story as the "Staked down Canon."

He proposed to Dove Eye to risk this conclusion, and to ride slowly on to that point which could be reached with their horses rested, and comparatively fresh, by daylight.

"Long Rifle may even now be fighting against many, with his few men," said Dove Eye. "If Red Leaf feels sure he has gone to the pass let him ride on. Dove Eye is not tired—she cannot get weary while she looks for Long Rifle."

So they rode on, with the stars for their guide, until the peaks of the hills began to show against the western sky.

"Are we near the pass that Red Leaf told me of?" asked Dove Eye, just as the morning star was seen.

"We are. Is not the daughter of Spotted Tail tired and hungry?"

"No. Ride on—ride on," said Dove Eye.

Yet for twenty-four hours she had been in the saddle. For thirty-six she had not tasted food. A drink of water taken in the palm of her hand as she rode through the stream had been her only refreshment.

"Ride on—ride on!"

These were the words of our noble Lodge Queen and Red Leaf sped forward, for now he could see the peaks which on either hand formed the gate or opening to the pass.

Dove Eye, seeing them also, rode close up to him as his horse went faster, and, silent and grim, the armed warriors, in their single line, followed in close order.

Suddenly the young chief halted, and held up his hand. He had heard a single shot, fired apparently in the gorge, or interior of the pass.

Then another and another was heard, and Dove Eye, riding to the front, cried:

"Forward! Long Rifle is in battle! Forward, braves of the Sioux—forward!"

CHAPTER XX.

A GALLANT CHARGE.

Regaining his first position, nearest the enemy, Buffalo Bill waited, with the patience which no one but a good warrior or a true scout can show, for the approach of daylight.

They were too far in the deep chasm for them to see when the morning star rose, but that there was a change in the density of the gloom, Buffalo Bill was the first to notice.

"Keep wide awake now, boys," he whispered. "Day is coming and we must watch for chances. The first death-shot is everything in a fight like this. It brings luck, and I must have it."

Laying aside his hat, Bill crept to a new position, down nearer the water, where a rock and some bushes covered him, and from which the rest of his party could see him and receive orders and signals, though there was room for but one were he lay.

He had seen the spot dimly between him and the water, and he told those in his rear that no one must try to get there, for but one could use the shelter.

He had been there but a little while when he saw that he could get a view of the extreme right of the body of ruffians and would be sure of his first shot, for they evidently were not aware of his having gained that important position, for they stood out a half dozen of them in his rifle, or even pistol-range, though as yet it was too dark to see them distinctly.

But he soon became aware of a new plan of devilry afoot, contrived by the fiendish mind of Snap Carter.

There was a ledge which if gained would overlook the position where Texas Jack, Overton, and the scout lay, and a tree reached from the ground where the ruffians were so near this ledge that a practiced climber could ascend it and leap from the topmost branch to the ledge, if he were active and cool.

And Buffalo Bill saw a young, active man, with his rifle slung to his back, attempting this feat, just as there was light enough for him to see the sight on his rifle when held toward the sky.

Motioning to Overton and the others to keep perfectly still when he fired, for they could only see him, and none of the enemy, the brave scout watched the ascent. It was made very quietly, and rather too rapidly, for it was yet very dark for a good shot when the fellow got to the upper branch; but it would not do to wait now, for in another second he would spring to the ledge and be out of the range of Bill's rifle.

So Bison William let him have it, aiming directly for his head, for he knew he must drop him, in a literal sense.

And he did. Without an audible word, the fellow sprang upward and fell at the instant the rifle-crack was heard, dropping right down among the astonished ruffians below, who believed the tree to be out of sight of the other party.

Buffalo Bill added to their astonishment and lessened their dinner-list a second later, for he had his Union Club rifle in his hand, and he sent another ruffian to his account, leaving two dead on the ground before the others realized their peril and sprang to cover.

Bill coolly held up two fingers to his own party to signify his success, and then watched for another chance.

The voice of Snap Carter was heard swearing fearfully, and several random shots were fired toward the new position of Buffalo Bill; but he was under good cover, and knew enough to keep it. The ruffians tried hard to get a sight on him, and soon lost another man for their pains.

"There's but one thing to do—we've got to charge and wipe 'em all out," yelled Snap Carter, letting Bill get only a glance at his head.

"Just try it, Sorrel-top, and see which does the cleanest work in the wipe-out," yelled Buffalo Bill.

"I'll show you cussed soon!" was the reply.

Then, at that moment, when Overton and his party were all braced up to receive the charge, terrible yells and a rapid firing were heard in the rear.

"They are Sioux!" cried Kionee the Creeper, wild with joy. "They are Sioux, and Spotted Tail has come to help Long Rifle."

The words of the boy sent a thrill of joy to the heart of Buffalo Bill, for, brave as he was, he knew that he had terrible odds to contend against in that fight, with his enemies intrenched also, and this aid in his rear seemed providential.

"Go back, half of you, with Kionee, to hail the warriors—go back and help to make a clean sweep of them who are in the rear, and then, when you come back, we'll teach these hounds in front what charging means," cried Buffalo Bill.

"Charge now and let them learn!" yelled Snap Carter, furious to hear the shots and shouts which told him that Hort Grizzle and his gang had themselves been taken in rear, and most likely were now catching it in front.

Three men sprang on to lead the rest, and Buffalo Bill saw them.

Not quicker does the electric spark leap along the telegraphic wire than did his finger twice press the trigger of his repeating gun. Two men leaped into the "Valley of the shadow of death," while the third staggered back appalled, just in time to avoid their fate.

"Four dead ducks to crow over!" said Bill. "Try that charge again, women-stealers!" he shouted to his enemies.

"I'll lead it myself, when we do charge!" cried the one who had been spokesman all the time—Snap Carter.

"Do—I want to spoil your beauty if you've any to boast of," said Bill, in the same taunting tone.

There was no reply, but he heard noises which made him almost certain that they were about to charge, and in a low tone the scout told his men to be ready, and to take it coolly, and fight sharp when it came hand-to-hand.

The firing now slackened in the rear, and in a few moments Buffalo Bill knew by the wild, terrible scalp-yells that he heard that the Sioux were completely victorious, and were now wrenching the scalps from the heads of the dead ruffians in the rear.

He had not long to wait for a certain knowledge of that event, for Kionee came rushing back with the Indian word for victory on his lips, and adding to it:

"Dove Eye—Dove Eye!"

"Surely she can't have come on my trail to help me!" said Buffalo Bill, in astonishment, almost forgetting the peril in front.

Not a minute later he saw her rushing on, rifle in hand, heading even Red Leaf as she hurried to the rescue of Long Rifle.

Fearful that she would throw herself in range of a fire from the front, the brave scout sprang back from his cover, risking his own person rather than that hers should be endangered, but, to his wonder, he was not even fired at, while he passed the space which was open.

Then, under cover, he met the heroic Lodge Queen.

"Why is Dove Eye here—so far away from her father's camp?" he asked.

"She came to save Long Rifle from his enemies, who were before and behind, and wanted to drink his blood."

"But how did Dove Eye know that I was overmatched and surrounded?"

"The Great Spirit told me so in a dream," said the girl.

"I'll believe in dreams after this," said Bill. "Did your father consent to have you come?"

"Yes. He gave me twenty warriors. Two are dead. We will go back and bury them, after all your enemies are killed. See—Red Leaf, the great chief, has six scalps in his belt. Two were from heads that I laid low. I knew that Long Rifle did not scalp his enemies with his own hand, so I told Red Leaf to take my scalps. Have I done well?"

"Nobly, brave, beautiful Dove Eye. You have most likely saved our party. But this reminds me that there are others to save. You have eighteen warriors left. I have not lost a man here."

"You lost one back, and I had him buried as we came along, to keep the wolves from eating him."

"Another of your noble acts, Dove Eye. If I wasn't married I do believe I'd love you, gal. But this is talk, it isn't business. We're strong enough to charge the party in front now, and to wipe them out and rescue the girls in their possession."

"Let us do it at once. I want to get this chill off from me," said Overton, shivering.

"Didn't I ask you to keep cool?" cried Bill, laughing.

"I could have done it here without the asking," said Overton, laughing for himself.

"Well, get ready, for I am going in," said Buffalo Bill. "It'll be sharp work, I expect. Men that keep as still as they do now mean fight. It is your noisy cusses that never amount to the froth on small beer."

"Will Long Rifle listen to a word of counsel from Red Leaf?" said the young chief, stepping forward.

"Yes," answered Buffalo Bill. "Yes, for Red Leaf is wise in council, as he is terrible in battle. I will hear what he has to say."

Red Leaf bowed his head to the compliment, and said:

"Red Leaf knows all this country well. He has gone through this pass a great many times. He knows where there is another pass, which he can go through before the sun is as high as a small papoose. He can go that way with his warriors, and come on the backs of the enemies of Long Rifle, and none can get away."

"The idea is splendid," said the scout, delighted at the plan. "We'll play their own game on them."

"Then, shall Red Leaf go?" said the chief, turning to Dove Eye.

"Yes, but Dove Eye will stay here with Long Rifle."

"It is well. We will run fast, for we will not take the horses that are tired," said Red Leaf.

"How may I know when you are at the other end of the pass?" asked Buffalo Bill. "We'll want to charge so as to busy them here, and keep 'em from breaking through your line."

"A gun-shot will reach your ears easy, and I will fire as soon as we come to the head of the pass," said Red Leaf.

"All right—we'll take it coolly till we hear from you," said the chief of scouts.

"I'd like to see you take it any other way in this out-of-doors cellar," said Overton. "I'll bring two overcoats and a blanket on my next trip, if it is in July."

The Indians, at a signal from Red Leaf, now filed rapidly away, and Buffalo Bill, placing only a guard to watch the front, fell back with the rest to get something to eat, for they had been too busy hitherto to attend to the material wants of the inner man.

An hour was thus spent profitably, and Overton had got over his chill, when all at once a gun, a single report, was heard away in the west.

"The signal!" cried Buffalo Bill, and his whole face flushed with a happy light. "Red Leaf has got to the end of the pass, and the retreat of the wretches in front has been cut off. Now, all hands listen to me. There'll be no play in the work before us. A cornered rat fights hard, and when even a coward can't run he'll shut his eyes, cry, and battle like a mad tiger. I've seen it, and know it. This work will be mostly hand-to-hand. So, put down your rifles and trust to your revolvers and knives. Do you all understand?"

"Yes, yes; why don't you give the word and let us go in?" cried Overton, all impatience.

"Because I want to see every man ready," said Bill, quietly. "Are you sure you are ready?"

"Yes, yes; don't you see I am—two knives and one revolver—I mean two revolvers and one knife, and my rifle."

"But I want you to drop that rifle—it will be in your way. Dove Eye, will not you stay back a little till the first of it is over?"

"Dove Eye knows her place—she will keep it," said the Lodge Queen, proudly, and she pressed even yet closer to him.

"Well, ready, then!" said Bill, and he drew his keen bowie-knife from the belt. "Watch me and follow where I lead. Charge, men, charge!"

And away he leaped like a panther to its prey.

CHAPTER XXI.

FLED.

When he turned the angle of rock, and faced a wall just built, higher than his head, Buffalo Bill thought he and his party would have their hands more than full, but he did not hesitate a second, he sprang toward it, and clutching at a huge ragged rock with his left hand, grasping his knife in his right, he sprang for the top.

In a second he was there, another and he was over, not meeting a volley as he expected, but seeing only the four dead men on the ground, whom he had killed—not a living enemy in sight.

"They have fled!" he cried, as his people came pouring over the breastwork behind him. "The cowards would not wait for us. But Red Leaf will intercept them, unless they got out before he reached the pass, and we'll soon know."

"There's a fire in there," said Overton. "I'm going to see how it feels."

"Why, man, you are all in a sweat now," said Bill.

"Am I—well it was some exertion to get over that wall—breastwork, I suppose you'd call it. But look—Bill—here is a piece of paper—a letter—oh, what a beautiful hand to be written by a girl in such peril. She is as cool as—as cool as I was awhile ago."

And Overton handed the paper to Buffalo Bill.

It was written apparently with a pencil on a page torn from a pocket diary. It read thus:

"Brave friends, do not desert us. We are two helpless girls, in the hands of heartless ruffians. They are now getting their horses ready to fly and we are left alone for a moment. The leader, Snap Carter, says he will not halt till he gets to Nick's Cave in the Black Hills. I heard him tell one of his men so just now. Oh, help us, and may Heaven help you!"
LOTTIE HERBESON.

"Snap Carter? I know the wretch!" cried Buffalo Bill. "He was run out of Cheyenne by the vigilantes, after he

had killed two women just for spite. He is a devil incarnate. Overton, read that letter!"

The eyes of Overton were moist as he read, folded, and put it in a pocket over his heart.

"Bill!" said he, "I'll save that girl and marry her afterward—see if I don't. One who could write such a letter, under such circumstances, must be a queen among women. I never saw such beautiful handwriting. If she had been schooled at Rutgers College she couldn't write better!"

"Hark—there comes Red Leaf!" cried Buffalo Bill, hearing distant yells. "I must answer him."

And he put his hand to his lips and uttered a shrill cry.

It was answered by Red Leaf, and soon he and his warriors came bounding forward, their guns at a trail, for they had already discovered by their tracks that the white ruffians had fled from the pass.

"They had gone and were out of sight over the hills when we got to the pass," said Red Leaf to Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, and they will have a big start," replied the scout. "But I know where they are going. One of the captives left a speaking paper behind, and it tells me."

"Do not the speaking papers lie?" asked the chief, gravely.

"This paper speaks a straight story," said Buffalo Bill. "Does Red Leaf know of a great cavern by the big falling water of the Crow River?"

"Yes. Red Leaf knows where it is."

"Then that will be where we will find our enemies. Their trail will lead straight to it."

"It is a long journey," said Red Leaf.

"Yes, but we must make it. Long Rifle has taken the trail of bad men and he will never leave it until they are killed. He has sworn it."

"Then Long Rifle must not break his word. If Dove Eye, the Queen of the Lodge, says so, Red Leaf and the braves with him will go on with Long Rifle and never turn back until the scalps of his enemies are in their belts."

"Dove Eye wills that it shall be so," said the brave girl.

"Then Red Leaf will go back and bury his dead and get his horses, but first these scalps must be taken."

"They are for Kionee the Creeper," said Buffalo Bill. "I killed them—and to him I give the scalps."

In a second it seemed as if that boy, scarce half-grown, had become a man. He straightened up till he seemed a head taller. While his black eyes flashed like the very orb of a mad rattlesnake he uttered the terrible scalp-yell, and the hills fairly rang with bewildering echoes till it seemed as if they were full of Indians yelling near and far.

Then, drawing the knife of Spotted Tail from his belt the knife which had taken many a scalp before, he bounded toward the bodies of the dead men.

Far more quickly than my rapid pen can sketch the deed with savage skill, artistic in the eyes of red men, he whipped off the trophies, and again his "scalp-cry" rang through the wild canon until it seemed as if there were a thousand answering voices to rejoice in his triumph.

Dove Eye smiled on the boy warrior, and this was a new delight to him.

But he did not smile. It would now have been beneath his dignity to laugh.

"The next scalps I take will be from men whom I kill myself," he said, as he put these scalps in his belt.

"That's right, my brave little red," said Buffalo Bill.

"You have the making of a great hero in you. But now we must be ready to move. Clear away the barricades and get the horses up. Those rascals will have ten miles the start at the very least before we are on their trail."

CHAPTER XXII.

A HALT.

When Snap Carter was just ready to lead his men in a desperate attempt to "wipe out" Buffalo Bill and his party he heard the yells of the Indians who were closing in on Hort Grizzle and his band, and he knew by the volume of fire that he heard, that it was a heavy attack, one likely to overwhelm Hort quickly, when help would undoubtedly reach Buffalo Bill.

He knew that it would be madness to attack the latter then, and that to escape a charge himself he must fly.

"Get up the horses, men, we've got to leave here," he cried. "We'll not rest till we get to Nick's Cave in the Black Hills. The reds are with them and they're too many for us. That Buffalo Bill is the keenest hand on the trail that ever sat a saddle."

Rushing to get his own horse, he gave Lottie Herbeson a chance to write the note given in the last chapter, for the guards had also rushed to get their horses.

Dropping the note behind her, when the horses were brought up, Lottie went forward with her sister when called, for she knew that hesitation or resistance would be useless, and would only cause them to receive worse treatment and do no good, for they were utterly helpless.

So when their horses were brought the girls were mounted in a moment, and swiftly, silently, the column, headed by Snap Carter, and with a rear guard in command of Hunker Ben, rode from the canon.

They were rising a ridge, may be a couple of miles beyond, or rather just passing over the ridge, when Hunker Ben got a sight of the Indians coming out of the lower pass to cut off the retreat which had been already effected.

Leaving a man to take charge of the rear guard, Hunker Ben rode forward to tell his chief what he had seen.

"Buffalo Bill is smart!" said the captain, grimly. "But he has found his match this time. I was just an hour too fast for him. It will take him two more to find out I have gone, and to get the wall broke down and his horses up. So we'll have three hours the start. That will take us to a stream, and there we'll leave our trail in the water."

"Do you think Hort Grizzle has gone under?" asked Hunker Ben.

"I hope so," said Carter, savagely. "I made a fool's bargain with him which I didn't want to keep."

And he looked at Susie with a glance which made the poor girl shudder.

"What was it?" asked Hunker Ben, who noticed both the look and the shudder.

"That is my business. Go to the rear and attend to yours," said Snap Carter, in a surly tone. "We will have all we can do to keep out of their way now, since they have got reds to help them. That Buffalo Bill though is worse than any red that ever lifted hair. I know him. I was in a gang, when I was a boy, that he helped to wipe out. I had to turn tail early in that fight or I should have gone under."

"Is Buffalo Bill so much older than you?" asked Hunker Ben.

"No, we're near of an age. But that man has never known what it was to be a boy. I heard a chap that knew him say he commenced killing Indians when he was thirteen,* and he has been improvin' his time ever since. But go to your rear guard, Ben—we've got to keep a sharp lookout there, and I'll hurry this end of the line all I can and keep our horses in wind."

Hunker Ben, a little mollified by the kinder tone in which the last words were spoken by Carter, halted and let the column pass on, so as to join his guard when it came up, and Carter now looked to the girls, whom he had ordered, with a special guard behind them, to ride next to him.

"A bright morning," he said to Lottie, thinking he would try to be a little pleasant and see how she would take it.

"Too bright to shine on bad men!" she answered, curtly.

"Thank you! I owe you one for that. I'll pay you for it, and all the rest by and by."

Snap Carter spoke no more after his rebuff, but he drove his spurs savagely into the flanks of his horse and started the column into a run.

This he kept up until his temper cooled a little, and then he shortened in his reins and came down to a lope.

A couple of hours went by and then he struck a stream bordered by willows and cotton-woods, into which he rode without halting.

"Don't let the beasts drink till they're cool!" he cried, as he kept on up the shallow side of the stream. "There's time enough to take it easy, for we must have three hours'

start, and all our horses were fresh, and that was more than was the case with some of theirs."

So they rode on for a long distance, now in the edge of the water, where it was very shallow, and then out where it was deeper, where, when they wanted the animals could drink from the cold, snow-fed stream.

It must have been in the middle of the afternoon when they left the water, for the sun was well down in the west, and they left it where a rocky ridge commenced.

The moment the horses which the girls rode got out upon this hard, flinty ridge, they showed what Texas Jack had foretold, lameness, the consequence of having their shoes torn off.

When Snap Carter saw that the horses on which they rode could not stand the flinty route, and that he must either take another or change the girls to other animals, the brute in his nature again showed itself.

"Knock them cussed beasts in the head!" he said to one of his men, "and put the side-saddles on mules!"

"Please don't kill my pony!" said Lottie, tearfully. "I love it so much."

"That is a double reason why I should have it killed!" said Carter, laughing for once. "I don't want you to love anything but me."

The laugh seemed to put him in a better humor, and he cried out to the man whom he had ordered to kill the horses:

"Hold on—I've changed my mind, and we'll change our route over softer ground. Gal, you're so pert that I like you, and I'll go a little out of my way to please you."

"Will you?" said Lottie, who had been studying how she could delay the column. "Then stop and let our poor horses rest a little while we get something to eat, for I'm very hungry."

"I'll do that, too," said Snap Carter, "for I feel peckish myself not having had time lately to get a square meal."

So he turned back, crossed the river, and halting in a grove, told the men to turn their horses to grass for one hour, and to eat what they wanted themselves in that time.

"We'll go the faster for a rest and a feed," he said.

Then after posting pickets he built a fire and made coffee for himself and the girls, Lottie being quite cheerful since she had saved the horses and got him to halt.

If she could but delay him now and then, even by appearing to be more willing to receive his hateful attentions, it was something gained.

The hour passed and full half of another, when Carter, in a better humor than he had ever shown in that band, ordered the men to bit their horse again, mount and ride on.

He now kept up on the right bank of the stream until they reached a soft rolling prairie, and over it he bore away directly toward a great white peak, which he told Lottie was a snow-hill in the great Rockies, and fully three days' ride from where they were.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT SUPPER.

Snap Carter had made a good estimate of the time that would be used up before Buffalo Bill could get fairly started on his trail.

Fully three hours had gone by since the renegades left the pass before Buffalo Bill and his column took up the trail, and even then the Indian horses, tired by the long, steady run of all the day before and the continued night march, were in no condition to hold the pace on which Snap Carter and his gang started.

But the party was in better condition for the delay. Texas Jack had got his wounds carefully dressed, as had also Barnett, the other hunter, and both felt strong and able to ride as far as any of the party, though not in as good a fighting trim.

Norfolk Ben, a little sore from the pounding he had got on the head, was all ready for more of it, and he wanted to get a chance to pay back the blows he had received.

Mr. Overton, growing "callous," as Bill said, no longer talked about quilted saddles, but he kept thinking of, and once in a while talking about her who wrote that "beautiful hand," and whom he was determined to rescue with

* Another of our facts about Buffalo Bill.

his own hands if it could be done.

The sun was almost down when the column, following the trail in the water as well as out with unerring sagacity, reached the spot where the other party rode out on the flinty ridge, and then turned back.

"Didn't I say the beasts would go lame when they took the shoes off?" cried Texas Jack, exultingly, as he marked how quickly the hard ground had been felt. "We'll overtake 'em now, sure."

"Of course we will," said Buffalo Bill, as they followed the trail back across the stream and into the grove. "Hi! They've made quite a halt here—built a fire to cook by. I reckon they think we've given up the chase."

"Then they're out," said Overton. "We'll be up to them in two or three hours more."

"Not to-night," said Bison William, with a grave look. "Our animals are pretty well used up; they must have rest and grass. This is the best feeding ground we'll get this side of the Black Hills. We'll have to stop here to-night, and you'll not have to keep as cool as you did last night, for we can build a fire here."

"I can't keep cool while I think of those poor girls in ruffian hands," said Overton. "I'm so sorry we can't go on."

"You'd be more sorry if we were out on the plains when that broke," said Buffalo Bill, and he pointed to a dark storm bank rising swiftly in the west, coming from the storm-belt which seems to hover over the crests of the great mountain ranges.

"What will they do, if they are out in it?" asked Overton, his thoughts only on the girl captives.

"Conundrum!" said Bill, laughing. "They'll weather it, I reckon; but we must put the horses out while we can. When that storm breaks we've got to have 'em in where we can attend to them, or they'll stampede, and then I reckon you'll wish for a saddle, quilt or no quilt."

Buffalo Bill now gave the necessary orders, and the stock was put to feed, fires built, and food quickly cooked, while there was a chance, for that a great cloud bank rolled higher and higher, while the sun sank behind it, and far away could be heard the muttering thunder of the legions of the air, mustering to the mystic spell which darkens nature in a storm.

Overton, too much attracted by this new phase in Western life, a storm on the plains, working up, forgot all about being hungry, and had to be called twice by officious and useful Norfolk Ben before he thought of supper.

"Ben, what is your other name?" he asked, as Ben handed him a cup of coffee.

"Ben Wright, Marse Oberton. You see, ole Marse Herbeson he used to let his sarvant gals marry whom dey liked, and dat's de way it come. My mudder, she was Riah Herb'son; she married Marse Wright's man Ike, and dat's de way I come to be a Wright."

"And since you're Wright, you can't be wrong. So pour me out some coffee, Ben," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yah, yah, Marse Bill; you is jest de funniest man alibe. Gumbo-Jim! what's dat?"

It was a peal of thunder, sharp and loud, which startled Ben.

"It is a warning for us all to hurry up and get ready for a soaking," said Buffalo Bill. "But we've half an hour yet."

Dove Eye, though pressed to eat with the men, would not, but waited on by Kionee, she sat apart and took her food, while Red Leaf and the other Indians did the same.

When through, Red Leaf and the Indians quickly prepared a shelter from bark stripped from the trees, fastened to poles set upon upright crotches, and covered with other poles, in the thickest of the grove—made especially for Dove Eye, but not until Buffalo Bill and Mr. Overton consented to share the shelter, would she promise to use it.

The horses were now brought in and firmly fastened to trees, the arms secured, with the ammunition, from the approaching rain, and even the sentinels called in to the shelter of the grove, for there was no danger of attack in such a storm as that which was now close upon them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIFIC STORM.

They had left the stream and its tree-borders far behind before Snap Carter and his crowd noticed the storm-bank that was rising in the west. Then the ruffian crew were sorry they had not kept nearer the timber, for in an open plain, where the wind has a fair sweep, the tornadoes of the far West are sometimes as terrible to man and beast almost as the dreaded siroccos, or hot sand-storms of the Great Sahara Desert.

Carter urged on his horses to their full speed as night drew on, hoping to at least reach some ridgy country ahead, where he could camp partially sheltered from the wind, if not from the rain.

But his horses, already pressed very hard for two days, refused to respond to whip and spur, and night came upon him while yet in a very open country.

The storm was now on the point of bursting out, and he knew that mounted he could not keep his animals together, and that he must dismount and face the weather, let it come as hard as it might.

"There's one comfort," he said, when he gave the order to dismount and halt, to tether the horses and fasten them head to head.

"I'd like to know what it is?" said Hunker Ben, as he looked at the dense black clouds, and heard the thunder roll through the chill, heavy air.

"There'll be torrents of rain by and by to wash out every track we've made," said Carter. "Isn't that comfort? I'd like to see the scout that could find our trail after this storm sweeps by."

"It'll come as cold from them snow-peaks as a hypocrite's charity," said Hunker Ben.

"They'll never get an idea of where we're bound now," said Carter. "If I'd kept that rocky ridge, as I meant to before the girls' horses went lame, I would have made a nigh cut to Nick's Cavern. But, as it is over softer ground, when we left the stream we headed for Bridger's Pass, and that'll throw 'em clear off our track, if they take the course there, as I think most likely they will, for they'll strain all to make the cover of that timber before this storm reaches us."

A low laugh involuntarily broke from the lips of Lottie. She was thinking of the note she had left behind her, and which she felt sure must have reached the hands of the bold scout whom these ruffians so much dreaded. And she laughed without a thought of being heard, and some way because she couldn't help it, for before her last great sorrow came there was not a merrier girl alive than she.

"What are you laughing at, girl?" said Snap Carter, suspiciously.

"To think how it is going to rain, and we without even an umbrella," she said, so innocently that he laughed, too.

"We'll try to fix some kind of a shelter for you girls," he said. "We men can stand a drenching that would wash the life out of you. Here, men," he added, "stack your arms, muzzles down—stick 'em deep in the sand in a circle. Then we'll draw a couple of blankets over the pile, lash 'em secure, and let the women huddle under them as close as they choose. Hurry up; the storm is coming."

The men understood his idea, though it was a new one to them, and soon a tolerable and very firm shelter was arranged for the girls.

Now, the utter darkness which fell upon them was almost appalling. And the silence, too, was terrible—the silence of the grouped men and animals—for it seemed like the stillness of death, or that of a terror which could not speak.

But the silence was not of the elements long. The thunder which had been rolling its deep-voiced warnings from afar now broke loud and fearful close at hand, and the ragged zigzag lightning ran in red streaks here and there, as if huge serpents of fire were at war in the sky, lighting up the groups of scared men and horses, and making them seem thrice as large as they were.

The girls tried to shut their eyes to all this, but when the wind came screeching on, blowing till the men and horses seemed unable to stand, and indeed did lie down,

the girls dared not do otherwise than look up.

"Oh, how fearful!" moaned Susie.

"Better this, even better to die here in all this terrible turmoil, than to be in the peril from which I fled the night before last," said heroic Lottie.

"Yes, yes!" sighed Susie.

But now the wind and the thunder, and then the rain, in awful torrents, made so much noise that they could not talk. They only lay and shivered, clasped in each other's arms.

How long it lasted they could not tell. They could not sleep—they dared not, even if they felt like slumber.

The shelter, strange as it was, was so well made, that it withstood the rain and the wind, and when at last the storm broke away, and benumbed men and animals felt some relief, the girls were dry as when they went beneath it. The clouds went with the rain and the wind, and once more all was still but the dripping of the water from the scant shrubbery, or the growling of wet, discontented men.

The stars shone out in a clear, cold sky, and Snap Carter ordered the line of march to be taken up again. For here, there was no feed for his horses, no fuel to light a fire to dry by—they might better get warm in motion than to lay or stand about on the wet ground half chilled to death.

So the girls were remounted, and the crowd rode on till the day dawned, and then in a small valley where there was a little wood and a great deal of water—more than they wanted—they camped to rest and feed the animals, dry their clothes and arms, and cook some food, for almost utter exhaustion was the complaint on all sides.

Could Buffalo Bill and his party have ridden in on them there, fresh, the ruffians would hardly have been able to lift an arm in self-defense.

The sun came out clear and bright, and but for its soaked and bedraggled look the valley, though small, would have been beautiful.

"If I was sure them scouts would follow me no farther than they can see a trail, I'd take it easy and lay here all day. That ball in my shoulder hurts bad—I've caught cold in the wound, and it's terribly inflamed," said Snap Carter, addressing Hunker Ben, while the men were getting breakfast.

The outlaw had already seen the girls provided with food.

"They'd be fools to go any further than they could see our tracks, for surely they've no idea of our first regular halting place."

Lottie took care not to laugh this time. She had too nearly betrayed herself before.

"Some men are foolish beyond conception in such things," said Carter. "They get their heads set one way and never know where to stop. Our best plan will be to start and keep on as soon as the men and animals are a little rested. We can go as far as the Little Wolf Creek, where it forks with the Crow, and camp there, if we start from here at noon, well rested."

"Well, if that's your plan, I'll drop down and get a little rest," said Hunker Ben. "I never needed it more."

"The rest of the men will do the same, when they're done eating," said Carter. "I'll give them till noon at any rate. My shoulder pains too bad for me to sleep, and I'll look out for the stock and keep an eye abroad."

Seeing no immediate danger, the poor girls now sank down upon a blanket spread for them under a shady tree apart from the main group, and they were soon asleep, literally wearied out.

What a contrast—they, so young, and pale, and beautiful—the wretches beyond, hideous in their disguises, the paint half washed off, but even that only bringing out their natural ugliness into more conspicuous light.

The head ruffian of them all, suffering now too much from the inflamed wound which he had received from Texas Jack to think of immediate harm to them, was striding to and fro in the foreground breathing now a groan and then a curse, while his sharp, restless eyes wandered far and wide over the plains to the east, the only direction which seemed to be dangerous to him.

The horses feeding on the grass, bettered by the recent rain, the fire smoking up from wet wood, the rusted arms scattered about where the men dropped to sleep; it was,

take it all in all, quite a picture for an artist to study and work up.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ARMY OF WARRIORS.

So well prepared in the thick grove of willows and cotton-wood where the wind had but a poor sweep, was Buffalo Bill and his crowd for the storm, that it came and went by without doing them any damage worth speaking of. Their stock was well secured and not a horse broke loose to disturb the quiet of the others.

So when the day dawned, bright and clear, there was nothing to keep them back from the pursuit.

"Why, the rain is over," said Overton when he rose from between the two India-rubber blankets spread out by the forethought of the scout. "It was just coming down in rivers when I went to sleep."

"It did sprinkle a little in the night. By the way that river howls we'll have a bad chance for a crossing."

"Do you want to cross here?" asked Overton, looking at the red, turbulent torrent.

"I did, if I could, for we could shorten our route to the hills by at least half a day, if not more. The stream takes a terrible bend right here. I don't want those scoundrels to get there so far ahead of us that our coming will be too late to save the poor girls. As long as we can keep the wretches busy by our pursuit the girls are safe from annoyances."

"Then do let us push on."

"I will as soon as the horses feed and the rest of us get a bite to eat," said Buffalo Bill, in his quiet way.

So Overton lighted a cigar and smoked while breakfast was preparing, unconscious that Dove Eye, who had made her toilet at the river side, was making a study of him in her quiet way.

"What do you think of that pale-face friend of mine?" asked the scout, in a low tone, as he saw who Dove Eye was looking at so intently.

"Pretty good for a pale-face," she said. "Has he got any squaws at home?"

"I can't say," said Bill, laughing. "I saw about a thousand, more or less, who seemed to have their caps set for him. He is quite a ladies' man at home, if I'm good of eye-sight."

"He'd better be his own man," said Dove Eye, quaintly. "He is high, like a big elk, and holds his head up. He is young, and straight, and strong. He'd make a good warrior, with Long Rifle to show him how to fight."

"What are you and Dove Eye talking about?" asked Overton, shaking the ashes from his cigar.

"We were talking of you," said Bill. "She wants to know how many wives you have."

"Tell her not one yet, but if we can save that girl who writes such a beautiful hand I'll have her."

"Boss, there's smoke away here to the left, across the river," said Texas Jack. "A camp, but it's a long way off!"

"Yes; these rascals got across before the storm, and they're drying up now. But we've got to go farther up before we can cross. We'll move just as soon as breakfast is over. The horses will have eaten enough by then. Ah! what do you see there?"

Buffalo Bill pointed to more smoke rising to the right of the stream—several large pillars, as if there was a big camp in that direction.

"Smoke!" said Texas Jack, "and built too careless for Indians. Boss, our game is there."

"I believe you, my boy!" cried Bill. "We'll saddle up in a hurry. If our game is there we'll be on them tonight, as sure as I'm a sinner."

In twenty minutes the horses were all up, and in ten more the column was in motion—the morning meal having been swallowed in a hurry; for the scout felt sure that he would again strike the direct trail of those he pursued, which he had not hoped to do when the torrents of rain came on, at least not until he was near the cavern rendezvous.

"This is something like!" said Overton, as he rode forward at a gallop, by the side of the scout once more.

"Like what?" asked Bill.

"Like going!" said Overton. "I hope you'll keep it up till we overtake those fellows."

"Callous! No more talk about quilted saddles," said Buffalo Bill, smiling. "You're broken in. Halt—close up!"

The last order, given to the column with a sharp voice, as Buffalo Bill checked his own horse on the instant, told that something unusual caused it.

Overton looked ahead, and just rising a ridge, directly in front, he saw what seemed to him at least a thousand mounted Indian warriors.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SMOKING THE PIPE OF PEACE.

"I reckon we'll have a stirring time now," said Overton, as he saw this painted horde, their line bristling with spears, halt on the crest of the ridge, while Bill, as if to himself, ejaculated:

"Shoshonees!—and a war-party!"

"Snakes! Worse than Shoshonee!" said Red Leaf, gravely, for he had ridden forward to the extreme front now.

"Snake or Shoshonee, if they mean fight we'll have our hands full," said Buffalo Bill. "I'll have to try strategy. I'll soon see what they're made of. Texas Jack, I leave you in command while I'm gone. Overton, keep back. Red Leaf, come with me—lend me that spear of yours."

All this was said in a few seconds, and when Buffalo Bill and Red Leaf galloped on directly toward the Indians the former fastened a white handkerchief to the spear-head.

"Form in circle, ready to face out; dismount, and tie the animals head to head, and hobble!" cried Texas Jack, the moment Bill rode on.

He knew how the attack would come if it was made; that the band, though large enough to ride them down in one wild, sweeping charge, would not make that, but would circle around them like a hawk swooping above its prey, picking them off, and watching for a chance to break them apart before they made a direct dash.

This quick and prompt formation for defense was not lost, for it made the Indians on the ridge hesitate, and when Buffalo Bill, with Red Leaf, was within rifle shot of them, and there halted, several warriors, evidently chiefs, rode up together and seemed to consult.

Buffalo Bill, with Red Leaf by his side, sat motionless on his horse, holding the spear erect, so that the white flag blew out plainly visible in the gentle breeze.

There seemed to be quite a discussion going on among the Indians on the ridge, for violent gesticulations were seen among them, and it was evident that some were for immediate attack, without waiting to see who were in front, and that others, with cooler, wiser heads, opposed it.

Buffalo Bill took advantage of this delay to fill the great council-pipe which Spotted Tail had given him, and which he carried over his shoulder in its sling, and lighting it, he commenced to smoke.

Red Leaf, looking on the pipe with veneration, said:

"My brother must not lose the great council-pipe of Spotted Tail."

"Not without I lose myself," said the scout. "It may come in use pretty soon. A new thought came into the mind of Long Rifle just now."

"If the Great Spirit put it there it is good," said the chief.

The wiser counsel among the Snake warriors seemed to prevail, and now two chiefs rode out singly from the main body, and came toward the spot where the scout and Red Leaf sat still as statues, on motionless horses.

"Do you know them?" asked Buffalo Bill, as the chiefs came slowly nearer, so that faces and forms were plain. "No," said Red Leaf. "The Snakes and the Sioux do not often meet. They have been at war, though now they have promised the Great Father, like us, to keep peace."

By this time the Snake chiefs were within pistol shot, and they checked their horses.

Buffalo Bill rode boldly forward half way, and planted the spear-butt in the ground, laid his rifle down beside it, and dismounted.

Red Leaf, without instructions, kept his post, ready if he saw a hostile motion, to use his weapons in defense of the scout.

The Snake chiefs looked at the scout, spoke a word to each other, and then dismounted. They then took off their arms and laid them down by their horses, an example which Red Leaf followed.

Then the three Indians at once advanced to the spot where the heroic yet politic scout had planted the flag of truce.

"How!" said Bill, using the salutation common to every tribe in the West which ever mingle with white men.

"How!" grunted the Snake chiefs, but they did not reach out their hands in friendship, though both looked at the pipe which Buffalo Bill smoked as if they knew it.

"The Snake warriors have come a long way south of their hunting-grounds," said Buffalo Bill. "Are there no buffalo on their lands that they must come here?"

"Who is the pale-face who questions the red man who is master of the plains?" asked the oldest chief.

"I am known to the red men as Long Rifle; the Black-feet have called me Sharp Eyes, because I can see through a red man's heart and read his thoughts," said the scout, without any bravado in his tone, but firm and collected.

"Ugh! What is the Gray Wolf, who stands before you, thinking of now?"

And the old chief pointed to the younger.

"Gray Wolf has been counting how many is in my band of red braves and white warriors, and he is thinking his tribe would lose many men if they went to battle with us."

"Ugh! It was so," said Gray Wolf, in astonishment, perhaps not thinking that every look and expression of his face had been studied even while the scout was speaking.

"What am I, the 'Man with the Strong Hand,' thinking of," asked the old chief.

"You are thinking that he who holds the great council pipe of Spotted Tail in his hand, and talks, while Red Leaf, the great war chief of the Big Horn Sioux, is still, must be a mighty warrior."

"Ugh! The pale-face has read the thoughts of the Man with the Strong Hand."

"Then smoke the peace-pipe," said the scout.

The oldest chief said:

"I will go back and talk to my people. Gray Wolf will stay here."

And he turned, went to his horse, mounted, and rode back, leaving his arms behind him.

Again the head men gathered together on the ridge, while all the rest of the Indians sat still and motionless on their horses.

And a long talk ensued. As usual, the younger men were wild for war. Like young bull-dogs, fight is always in them, and they were hard to hold. At last wiser counsel seemed to prevail.

The Man with the Strong Hand came back, and with him the head chief of the party, both unarmed.

Buffalo Bill saw that the talk would now most likely end peacefully, so he turned the tobacco and ashes out of the great pipe, and carefully refilled it with choice tobacco, mingled with kinnikinic.

When the two Indians came up the chief introduced the other.

"This is Red Lightning, the great war chief of the Snakes," he said. "When he strikes men go down like grass that is dry before the fire."

"If Red Lightning has come to smoke the pipe of peace with Long Rifle, a soldier of the Great Father, and with Red Leaf, a chief in the Sioux Nation, then Long Rifle is glad, and he will light the pipe which he has filled. If not he will go back to his band and fight."

"The pale-face makes a brave talk, and he looks as if he had a brave heart behind his words. Red Lightning will smoke the pipe of peace."

Bison William drew out one of Uncle Ned's candle-matches, lighted the pipe, and passed it first to Red Lightning.

The latter put it to his lips, drew a mouthful of smoke, and looking reverently up, sent a cloud circling in the air, in honor of the Great Spirit.

Then, four successive blasts of smoke were sent north,

east, west, and south, to show that there must be peace in every quarter from which the wind blows.

This done the chief handed the pipe to Buffalo Bill, who imitated Red Lightning in his ceremonies, and then handed the pipe to the Man with the Strong Hand.

Each one, Red Leaf included, having smoked the pipe with the same ceremony, its ashes were emptied out, and the pipe was gravely restored by the scout to the sacred rattlesnake-case in which it was always kept.

"Now, before I go to my own people, will Long Rifle tell me where he and his party are going?" asked Red Lightning.

"We go after some bad pale-faces, who, dressed like Indians, murdered the men of a small emigrant party and stole their women. We saw their smoke awhile ago, but it has gone out while we have been talking."

"The eyes of Long Rifle are very sharp; he will soon find the trail of his enemies. Now let our people meet in peace, then we will change presents with each other so we may know when we meet again that we are friends, and we will part."

"Where does Red Lightning mean to ride?"

"First, to where buffalo is plenty, to dry meat. Then back to fight the Black Feet, for they came in on our village one moon ago and took scalps when our braves were asleep."

Buffalo Bill now mounted, and while the Snakes rode back to their line he rode to his, followed by Red Leaf.

"It's all over," said Bill, addressing Overton. "They hung fire a good while, and I thought one time we'd have to fight. But I worked 'em down, after they saw the pipe of Spotted Tail, so it is all right now. We've got to make some presents directly, but don't give away all you've got. Keep every weapon; those are what they like to get, but those they must not have."

"Ready, men; mount and prepare to answer their salute in their own fashion," continued Buffalo Bill, as he saw the Indian line begin to move.

"Heavens, Bill! they're charging right down upon us," said Overton, cocking his rifle.

"Of course they are," said William, coolly. "Have you any hair to spare?"

"A pretty time for joking! Why don't you give orders to fire?" cried Overton, angrily, for the whole body of Indians, wildly yelling, were coming at a swift gallop right toward them. "I'll let 'em have the contents of my Spencer anyway."

"Hold on! Don't be foolish!" cried Bill, seeing that Overton really would fire. "They're only showing off."

At the same instant the Indian mass parted right and left, firing their guns in the air, and swept by, whooping and yelling, as Buffalo Bill, giving the word, caused his party to return the salute.

Then coming back in line, the Snakes dismounted and the chiefs came forward to where Buffalo Bill, Mr. Overton, Dove Eye, Red Leaf, and Texas Jack stood apart from the rest.

The Snake chiefs were astonished to find a woman, and she the daughter of a great chief, in the party, and Red Lightning seemed greatly smitten with her beauty, as well as her courage.

Presents were now exchanged—pipes, tobacco, medals, scarfs, etc.—to the apparent satisfaction of all parties, and then once more the peace-pipe, this time that of the Snakes, was lighted and smoked by the head men on all sides.

Then both parties mounted and separated, the Snakes going south, and Buffalo Bill once more heading to the west.

"Full four hours lost!" muttered Overton, looking at his watch as the march was resumed.

"Anything but lost, my anxious friend," said Buffalo Bill. "Time spent in keeping out of a bad fight isn't wasted by any means. Do you know how many warriors there were in that gang?"

"A thousand, at least," said Overton.

"About a quarter as many, but they would have been too many for us, for they fight hard."

"But it seems as if we never would overtake those wretches that have the girls in their power," cried Overton.

"Yes, we will, and soon, too. They most likely had to take the brunt of the storm last night on the open plains.

If they did they'll be half tuckered out, and they'll go slow to-day. If we don't overhaul them in camp to-night I'm not good on the guess."

"I hope we will," said Overton. "What makes Dove Eye so quiet?"

"I suppose she is thinking about the pale-face girls I told her of that had set their caps for you," said Bill, laughing.

"You come East again and I'll get even," said Overton.

"Wait till you're through here before you talk of what you'll do when I go East again," said the scout.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MEMORY AT WORK.

After his horses had been fed a few hours, and many of them, full, had lain down, and his men had slept, while he in his agony had paced to and fro all the time, for his wounded shoulder grew worse instead of better, the chief of the renegades, Snap Carter, gave orders to saddle up for a fresh start.

"We'll have ample time to get to a good camp up in the hills," he said, "by night, if I don't go crazy with this shoulder. It is swollen till I've had to cut my hunting coat open."

"If you will let me I will dress the wound, and maybe it will be easier then," said Lottie, in a tone so gentle, so kind, that the outlaw was more startled than he would have been if a rifle-ball had grazed his ear.

"What?" he said, in a maze of bewilderment. "Would you do a kindness for me, after I have been so cruel to you?"

"Yes, while you are suffering! If you were well, I could kill you, as you killed, or had my brothers killed. But you suffer, and I'm sorry for you. Let me dress your wound."

"Well, for a woman, you beat all I ever knew or heard of," he muttered, and then he called Hunker Ben to help him get his hunting coat off, for he could not do it alone.

Then Lottie got a cup of water from a spring, cold and clear, and with a piece of her sister's handkerchief, that was soft and clean, she washed the ragged edges of the wound, and laid water on it until the inflammation was very much reduced.

Then she tore a scarf which she wore in slips, one or two portions of which she purposely dropped to the ground, and laid the wet handkerchief in thick folds over the wound and bound it to its place with pieces of the scarf.

All this time the rough, wicked man, uttering none of the bad words which had been continually breaking from his lips, bore her operations in a kind of softened wonder.

When she was all done, and she took plenty of time, for to speak the truth, her whole object was to delay him and keep him back all she could, so the others would get up, she told him she hoped he felt easier.

"I do," he said, "and, gal, this kindness of yours hasn't set you back a bit with me. I didn't deserve it, and—but I'll not talk. I'll think while we ride tow'rd the hills."

He was almost tender now in his manner as he told his men to lift the girls into their saddles and to do it easy, and he looked at them more kindly than he had ever done, when he asked if they were all ready, before he gave the order to move on.

The line of march now led toward a group of wooded hills seen in the west.

The air was cool and pleasant, for lightning and rain are great renovators, atmospherically speaking, and the horses, with their long rest, moved briskly on.

The men, too, once more dry, were not so gruff, and many a rude jest broke from their lips as they sped forward.

Most silent of all, Snap Carter rode at the head of the line. He seemed to be immersed in thought.

What it was no one knew but himself. Perhaps the kind words and acts of that young girl had carried his memory back to his boyhood's home. Perhaps he saw in his mind's awakened eye a young sister like her, pure, good, and beautiful. Who can tell?

Night was close at hand when the column of desperadoes

reached the foot of the rocky and well-wooded hills, which had been in sight all the afternoon.

Snap Carter dashed forward when they entered the timber strip, and soon selected his camping-ground, for he knew every foot of the country now before him. To use his own words, he was now on his "old stamping-ground."

It was on a fine, level spot, with plenty of grass close at hand.

Here a stream, which was broad and shallow at the grass savanna, narrowed between two low ledges of rock, and ran by with a laughing ripple that would have sounded like sweet music to those captive girls under any other circumstances.

Close beside this stream Snap Carter ordered a bush shelter raised by some of his men, and he said to Lottie, when it was finished:

"There you and your sister can remain undisturbed to-night, after you have eaten supper. You did me a good turn this morning, and I haven't forgotten it."

"Thank you," said Lottie. "If you will let me dress your wound again before you sleep, you will rest easier."

"You may dress it if you will, but sleeping isn't hardly in my line just now. I can trust myself when I'm not mad, but I can't trust them that are under me."

Lottie did not understand him then, but there was a time to come when she would.

So she got water from the stream, colder and clearer than any they had yet seen on the journey, because it was nearer the snows, and she carefully and tenderly dressed the wound as before, and what was strangest of all, a tear from his eyes fell on her hand while she was at work.

It was no pain that caused that tear, for he did not wince. It must have been memory at work.

"Sleep, and sleep in peace! I shall not be far away, and no harm shall come to you!" said Snap Carter, after Lottie had finished the work.

Then the supper was brought to the girls by the man who acted as cook, and when it had been eaten they retired within the tent, or rather house, of boughs, and lay down on the blankets which Carter had caused to be spread there.

The last they saw of him he stood near the stream, looking with dark and lowering eyes upon a party of his men, who seemed to be listening to something that Hunker Ben was saying to them.

There was a terrible expression on his face, as a blaze from the camp-fire lighted it up, and had it not been for that tear, and his manner, when he told them to sleep in peace, Lottie and Susie would have felt alarm.

They were, however, very tired and very sleepy, and the night was not far advanced when, lulled by the song of the waters and the rustle of leaves above their heads, they fell into a deep and refreshing slumber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TREACHERY.

Snap Carter, though appearing lost in thought, as they rode on that afternoon, was not only thinking of many things, but taking heed to what might at any time be expected from such a set of villains as those he now commanded—a plot to overthrow him, and to take his captives from his hands. He had heard a few words dropped from Hunker Ben, and responded to by another wretch, which opened his eyes, but, with his usual consummate self-command, he had not shown the least sign, by look or demeanor, that he had heard a word or felt any suspicion of their rascality.

From the moment he got an inkling of the intended treachery, there was not one second that he was not on the alert, and that, too, while not seeming to notice them at all.

Seeming absorbed in thought, he did not even place the usual guards upon post, over the horses or about the camp, and the men, thinking that he believed the pursuit was given up, were glad to have it so. Yet he had a reason for it.

When Hunker Ben and his click, for he had a click who worked with him in everything, held their talk, though

his back was partly turned toward them, Snap Carter heard every word that was said.

"The cap, or we may as well drop that and call him Snap, has grown spooney over them gals," said Hunker Ben. "Here we are, out on a two weeks' trip and not a dollar made—nigh onto twenty men gone under, and no chance ahead. Now I move we take the upper hand of Snap Carter, put him under the sod if he doesn't like it, take the gals for ourselves, and face off for the railroad, fix up all right in our Indian togs, run a train off, and sweep it of money and jewels. What do you say, boys?"

"I say it's O. K., and I'm for makin' you cap'n, besides," said one.

"And I, too," said another.

And the whole party, nearly two-thirds of the gang, expressed their assent.

"All right!" said Hunker Ben. "I'll do the square thing by you, but let me boss the whole job. We'll wait till he goes to sleep, or better yet, till moonrise, and then we'll pitch for the girls. When he hears them he'll start to get up, but I'll put a man over him that will settle his hash before he can wink twice."

"Then we'll do as we like. Hey?"

"That's the ticket!" was the cry, and then, after a low-toned conversation, the men separated.

Hunker Ben, seeing where Snap Carter stood, apparently lost in thought, approached him to satisfy himself if there was any suspicion in the leader's mind of what was going on.

Carter started, when the other spoke, as if he had just awakened from a dream, and asked him what time of night it was.

"I should think it was about bedtime for me," said Ben, yawning most naturally, "that is if you don't want me to stand watch?"

"No. There's no need of it," said Carter. "All trail of us was washed out in the storm and Buffalo Bill has most likely gone back. I shall take a look at the horses and then turn in."

"That suits a T," muttered Hunker Ben, as he walked off to the place where most of the men lay on the other side of the main camp-fire from the bough-house.

Carter was gone a long time, so long that Hunker Ben began to feel uneasy and was just going to look for him and see what he was doing when he came back and went into the willow thicket where he intended to sleep.

"It is all right now," said Hunker Ben. "He'll be in the land of Nod soon. Quiet, lads, and let Snap Carter drop to sleep. It shall be his last."

The men dropped down and all was still in camp but the rustling of the wind-swept branches and the noise of the rushing water.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REDEEMING HIS WORD.

The last thing which Susie Herbeson thought of when she closed her eyes in slumber was the strange and terrible expression on the face of Snap Carter, made very vivid by the gleam of the firelight falling upon it.

The last thought on the mind of Lottie, before she dropped asleep, was what caused that hot tear to drop from the eyes of a man she supposed to be incapable of feeling—much less of shedding tears.

And dreams came to both these girls, evidently founded, as dreams often are, upon their last waking thoughts.

Susie dreamed that she was walking in a flower garden among roses, and pinks, and flowering vines, with arbors here and fountains there, while birds filled the air with soft, sweet melody. The spot seemed enchanting, and she wandered on from spot to spot, till she almost wearied of the excessive loveliness.

Tired of going on, she saw with delight a beautiful little summer house, and she thought she would go in and rest.

But, as she ascended a step and looked in at the open door, she saw a man with a hideous face, extending his arms to clasp her, and the face was that she had last seen, the frowning visage of Snap Carter.

Such was her terror that she woke, all perspiring and trembling from its effects.

and your brothers were killed before I got up. I don't say it to lessen my crime, for I was in the party, and would have shot as quick, and maybe quicker than any, if I'd been up, but I wasn't. So the actual shedding of their blood isn't on my hands. And that is a little comfort."

"To me a great deal, for I will not hate you now. But you don't speak of my father. Was not he killed?" cried Lottie.

"I thought so at first, but when we were in Staked-down Canon I heard that dare devil scout say something which makes me think he was badly wounded, but not killed."

"Oh, if it is so, and we can find him again, how happy it will make us!" cried Susie.

"Can you do it?" asked Lottie.

"I can try," said Carter, quietly. "I shall not rest till I get you in some safe place. But we are in a bad region now. You have no idea how bad. This is a kind of hunting-ground for bad Indians and for worse white men. There are hundreds of desperadoes in these hills scattered about, a large band being associated. That which I led, and from which we escaped this morning, is a part of it. I must evade all these, keep you clear of the wandering Indians, and get you out of this region, if I can."

"You can; I know you can now, for you have said you would try," said Lottie.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE TRAIL AGAIN.

We have got to go back to follow the fortunes of Dove Eye, our heroine, and Buffalo Bill, our hero—the lady first always—and the reader has got to go with us.

After leaving the Indian war party which had detained him so long the brave scout pushed his horses rapidly in the direction where the smoke had been seen, and a little before night reached the place where the desperadoes had made their long halt to rest, dry, feed their horses, etc.

Here Overton, who since finding the letter had been on the lookout for signs and tokens of her who wrote such "a beautiful hand," found the pieces of silken scarf which Lottie had purposely dropped. These he showed to Buffalo Bill as a proof that the girls were yet alive, and he had his enthusiasm dampened a little when the scout muttered:

"Rags—nothing more."

But Overton carefully placed these relics by the side of the letter in the breast-pocket which was nearest his heart, and muttering something about finding her or dying, he turned to Norfolk Ben, to whom he had taken a great liking, and called for a cold lunch that he had intrusted to that worthy, so that he could be prepared to live a little longer for her.

Buffalo Bill made a short halt here, to let his horses feed and drink, and to refresh his party, for he felt sure that the others would camp at the gap in the hills ahead that night, and he meant to overtake and surprise them in their camp.

After he had lunched he called Dove Eye, Red Leaf, Texas Jack, and Overton aside, and told them of his hopes and his plans. For, though not given to talk, when he felt that the consummation of their adventure must be near, he wanted them to share in his hopes and his plans.

Texas Jack was alone dubious.

"They had a long rest here," he said. "By the way the grass is cropped and trampled they staid here fully half a day. They'll not halt there."

He pointed to the hills, and then he added:

"They'll keep right on for the rendezvous of the gang in Nick's Cavern."

"I don't believe it," said Bison William. "They thought the storm had washed their trail so it could not be followed, or they would not have lain here and slept and fed for at least five or six hours. And, thinking so, and that we've given up the chase, they'll camp just as soon as they get to the hills yonder. That is why I am taking it so cool now, for with a rest we can ride there in less than three hours, and I don't want to be seen till we are right in on top of them. Then we can wipe 'em out before they can say goose."

"Maybe so, boss—maybe so," said Texas Jack.

But the shake of his head told that he was not convinced by the argument Buffalo Bill had advanced.

After leaving the little valley, Buffalo Bill led his column quite leisurely until dark, for he did not wish to be seen from the hills, but now having noticed how exactly the trail pointed to a particular notch in the hills, he rode forward faster.

When he was close up to the timber he called Red Leaf to him, and asked the chief if he knew the lay of the land where they were.

The chief answered that he did, and then Buffalo Bill told him to creep up and scout the ground and see if the camp was there, as he suspected. If so to return, and together they would plan the attack.

Red Leaf dismounted, as did all the rest of the party, red and white, to give their horses breath and strength for a charge, should one be made, and the chief went forward swiftly on foot, followed at his own desire by Kionee the Creeper.

The Indian was gone nearly an hour, and it was almost moonrise when he got back.

"Are they there?" asked Buffalo Bill, as Red Leaf came up where he stood.

"Yes, all. The two women sleep by themselves in a house made from bushes; the men are most all awake, and they talk mischief to the girls. But they will not strike till the moon comes up. The horses feed but a little way from camp. I have left Kionee there to scare them when we charge, so there may be no horses for the bad men to run away on. We will kill and scalp them all."

"Good! That talk suits me," said Texas Jack. "Boss, let's mount and be moving."

"Yes, yes, I want to save the girl who wrote that beautiful hand," urged Overton.

"Patience, boys; you shall all have a chance," said Buffalo Bill.

Then he made Red Leaf detail the position of the camp, the location of the bough-house as situated from the camp fire, which must guide them in the rush, and where the men were posted.

Then mounting all, and passing the word from man to man, till all understood, with Dove Eye on his left and Overton on his right—Red Leaf holding the post of honor in advance—Buffalo Bill walked his horses forward.

He did not mean to charge until the moment that discovery would be certain, but the moon began to rise above the trees a little sooner than he expected, and then, just as a glimmer of the camp-fire met his eyes, he heard a confused noise in the camp, as if the desperadoes were rushing to the work of mischief Red Leaf had told him about.

It was no time now for delay or hesitation.

Without a word, at a motion of the hand of Buffalo Bill, Red Leaf led the way at fearful speed, and the whole party dashed in upon the desperadoes, who, with fresh fuel heaped high on the camp-fire, and some with brands in their hands, were rushing about in singular confusion.

Shooting and yelling as they went in, Buffalo Bill and his party dashed upon the astonished wretches, who resisted more from habit than any thought of victory, for it was more like a massacre now than a battle.

At the first sound and shot Kionee the Creeper, with shrill yells, had stampeded all the stock, so that the ruffians had no horses to get away on, and now those who could not get temporary hiding-places in the bushes, or between the banks of the stream, were ridden down, speared, or shot by Indians or scouts with as little compunction and as little mercy as if they had been wild beasts.

The surprise was complete, the attack so sudden, so murderous, so overpowering, that while only a few of the attacking party were wounded, and not one killed, soon two-thirds of the desperadoes were slain or helplessly wounded, while the rest were scattered in concealment or in vain flight.

For now the moon rose higher and higher, and shriek after shriek from some discovered wretch told that the pursuit was relentless, the punishment speedy.

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For now the moon rose higher and higher, and shriek after shriek from some discovered wretch told that the pursuit was relentless, the punishment speedy.

Mr. Overton, dropping Hunker Ben with a mortal wound, rushed to the bough-house from which the disappointed ruffian was emerging when he shot him, but the

girls whom Red Leaf had reported as sleeping there were not inside.

Neither could he find them anywhere, though after the melee he rode wildly to and fro in the search.

At last the affair seemed nearly over. Of all that ruffian band only a few wounded and dying wretches lived, or could be found.

And these, when questioned, though threatened with instant death if they did not speak the truth, could not or would not say what had become of the girls.

"I'm dyin', and I know it!" groaned Hunker Ben. "There's no use for me to live. We chaps had made up our minds to kill off Snap Carter, our captain, since Bill Deekin was killed, and to take the gals for ourselves. We were to do it at moonrise, and when we went for 'em they wasn't to be found, and just then you charged and our clams were all baked—we're gone under!"

"Where is Snap Carter? Has his body been found?" asked Overton, eagerly.

"No, and it isn't like to be!" said the man who had been deputed to kill him, who gasped out blood from an internal death-wound while he spoke. "He was gone when I went for him before you came for us, and I reckon he has got off with the gals some way."

Search was now renewed on every side, but it only resulted in finding a few more of the hidden ruffians who, dropping their arms, had rushed neck deep into the stream to escape.

And light came without a sign or token of the girls being found, except that a part of the bough-house next to the stream was torn away.

But when the stock that had been stampeded was looked up, recovered, and brought in, then it was found that the ponies belonging to the girls, with their side-saddles, were missing, also the favorite horse of Snap Carter, with his saddle and bridle.

"They have been carried away by him, knowing what we were going to do—I'll bet," groaned Hunker Ben. "He'd been real spooney about them gals ever since one of 'em dressed his wounds. 'Twas that set us on to drop him and take 'em ourselves. 'I'll bet they went with him willing."

"Never," said Buffalo Bill; "never with the murderer of their brothers."

"Hold on, cap. He didn't have no hand in that. He was away in the rear when 'twas done. Me and Bill Deekin fired the first shots that dropped them. There's no use for me to lie—I told you I was—a goin'—oh—just one drop o' whisky—for—for luck."

There was no time to give him whisky now had it been on hand, for as the last word left his lips he sank back dead.

"Overton, you've got your man. That's one notch for you," said Bill.

"I'm not proud of it—poor devil," said Overton, gloomily. "Oh, where, where can those girls be?"

"We'll soon know. It is coming light now, and while Red Leaf and his gang finish up work that I don't want to do, you and I will ride out and look up the trail. Will Dove Eye come, too? She has a woman's heart and does not want to take scalps, I know."

"Dove Eye will go with Long Rifle and the brave from the great village by the sea," said the Lodge Queen, and with Kionee once more mounted and following, Buffalo Bill led the way out of the camp.

A wide circle, taking in the country for at least two miles around the late scene of conflict, was now made by the keen and experienced scout and his companions, while Red Leaf and his Indians finished the punishment and took the scalps of those who by their crimes had forfeited all claim to mercy.

Buffalo Bill had crossed the stream, and was entering a pass to go around a hill that was in their way, when he saw where a stone, moss-covered on one side had been broken and partially turned over in a little brook that ran through this pass.

He examined the mark very closely, and then rode on, with his eyes following the water-course.

In a little while he spoke.

"Mounted parties have followed up this stream, to hide their trail in the water," he said, as he rode on faster, to

find some point where the tracks could be seen plainer, and studied.

For nearly two miles they rode, and the trail was so well hidden by the running water that even Buffalo Bill could only here and there detect that a horse or horses had passed.

Then they came to a spot where a rock had caved freshly from the bank in the late storm, filling the channel, and here the riders had to leave the water.

Then with a cry of joy Buffalo Bill pointed out to Overton the tracks of three horses, side by side, close together, the one in the middle making a deep impression in the ground, as if horse and rider were heavy, while those on either side left faint impressions, as if the riders were light.

"The man and the girls have passed here; this is their trail," said the scout.

"Let us then dash on and overtake them," cried Overton, wild with excitement again.

"They have at least four or five hours' start, and are mounted on horses that have had feed and rest twice within less than twenty hours," said the scout. "We will, as soon as our people are rallied and our horses have fed, take this trail, but we must follow it with care, for this Snap Carter has been long on the plains, and is an old hand at evading pursuit. I'll do my level best to overtake him as soon as I can, but we have wiped out the worst of the wretches, and we can take it a little easier after this one. He seems to have treated the girls so well so far that the crowd got down on him, and meant to kill him. He got wind of it, and got away. So you see there doesn't seem to be any immediate danger to them, without he falls in with them that are worse than he."

Overton sighed.

"It's a pity you're married, Bill!" he said. "You'd be twice as fast after them girls if you wasn't."

Buffalo Bill laughed in his dry way, but made no other reply.

He merely turned his horse and rode back, saying, as he went:

"In two hours or less I'll take the trail, and keep it till we find the girls."

And thus Overton had to be satisfied.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HORSE-THIEVES AT WORK.

When he reached the sight of the desperadoes' camp and called his men together, Buffalo Bill was rather surprised to see Red Leaf bringing in a prisoner, for as he had not told the Indians to spare any of these bad men, neither ordering their extermination, he thought his very silence would have caused Red Leaf and his band to destroy all whom they found.

"This pale-face asked me in the name of the Great Spirit to take him before Long Rifle, and said that after he spoke to him he was willing to die," said Red Leaf.

The man whom he thus led forward was bold, almost defiant in his look, and did not seem to fear the fate which had fallen upon all, or nearly all, his late companions.

"What do you want of me?" asked Buffalo Bill, sternly.

For he did not feel like trifling.

"I don't want anything of you, more than about five minutes' time to talk to you, and then the decency of being shot by a white man, instead of being killed and scalped by a red. I've washed all the paint off, you see, and I want to die white."

"The request is reasonable enough. What else do you want to say to me?"

"To tell you something you'd never know but for me. Two men besides Snap Carter have got away. The cowardly cusses run at the first yelp they heard, and they're away up in the hills long before this."

"Why do tell me this?"

"Partly for spite, and partly because it is no use to keep it back. They know all the signals, and if you see fires burning, or lights flashing from any peaks to-night, you'll believe what I say."

"Whom can they signal to?"

"About two hundred just such as these that you've wiped out. And there's a lot of Utes and some Cheyenne Dog Soldiers linked with them. When they know where you are and how many there are of you, they'll be looking for revenge. And, stranger, I reckon they'll get it. Now, if you'll let one of your scouts put a hole through my head or heart, or do it yourself, which I'd like better—sail in. I've said my say and I'm ready to go."

Buffalo Bill laid his hand on the butt of his revolver, half drew it from the belt, and fixed his eye on the ruffian's face.

There was not a sign of fear in it. He was cooler than the scout himself.

"What's your name?" asked Buffalo Bill, for while he watched the man's face there seemed to be something in its expression which recalled a distant memory.

"Steve Hathaway," said the man, coolly.

"You rode the pony express through Bridger's Pass two seasons, didn't you?"

"I did," said Hathaway.

"Yes! You had your pony shot, but you saved the mail and carried it in with two arrows sticking in the bag, and one in your shoulder."

"Yes, who told you of it?" said the man, surprised.

"No matter. You were a better man then than you are now. But for that one brave, good act your life is spared now. Take one of those rifles from the ground, a bullet-bag, and a powder-horn, so you won't starve, and go."

"Stranger—I'd rather not. I'm in for a bad life, I can't lead any other, and now you've got me, you'd better snuff me out."

"I'm no stranger to you, Steve Hathaway," said the scout. "I'm little Bill, that you fished out of the Sweet Water, when I was driving ox team in the same wagon-train when we carried stores for General Johnson's men. Do you remember that?"

"I reckon I do; there was a powerful sight of ice in the drink that day. But that was long ago. I've done enough since to be hung for a dozen times if the vigilantes had caught me. So let drive, Bill, for now I know you; let drive, and do it quick, for I don't want to have these reds see me kick."

"I tell you again you are free," said Buffalo Bill. "I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head now for all the gold in Pike's Peak."

The man stood and seemed to think a minute, then said:

"Well, I'll take the life you give me. Let me have a horse and I'll go over the mountains, or some place where I can try work that is honest, just to see if I can pay you. I'll not go to them that I've been with, that's sure."

"Pick out your own horse, saddle, and blankets, and take them," said Bill. "And be quick, for I've a trail to follow."

"If it leads to Nick's Cavern don't take it," said Hathaway, "for that is headquarters for the band, and there's too many there for you with all your grit. And there's a large party of Ute Indians that have been camped close by for three months or more that are friendly with them, and will fight for them."

"Is this the truth, Steve Hathaway?"

"It is. I don't feel like lying when it can't do me any good."

"If you'd do me a favor I might put you in the way of leading a better life," said Buffalo Bill.

"What is it, and how can I ever lead a better life case-hardened as I am?" asked the desperado.

"You used to be the best express rider in the country. I expect you are as good yet. If you will go to Fort McPherson with a letter from me and then guide some troops back to help me, I'll get you employed as an army scout and get those who can do it to get the President to pardon all your past crimes. He can do it, for you've committed them outside of State lines."

Hathaway stood and reflected long before he answered. Then he said:

"If I only could live honest as I was living when we were on the Sweet Water, and could forget what I have done, I believe I'd be happy. As to turning on them I've been with, it is only what they'd do on me. So I don't care for that. There is no honor among thieves, and I know it. Bill, I'll take your letter, and if the command-

ant hangs me I'll charge it to you in the next world."

"He will not harm you, but will trust you when he reads the letter I will write. Kionee, give me this haversack full of dried meat. Pick two of the best horses in the lot—I mean from your lot, Steve, for they are rested and fresh. You know the route as well as I do. Ride as if you rode for life. I shall follow Snap Carter's trail and take it easy. You'll find my trail here when you come up with the toops, as I know you will come."

The released prisoner at once made his preparations and they were quickly concluded. In less than ten minutes he was in the saddle, his led horse by his side, and ready to start. In the meantime Buffalo Bill had written and directed his letters.

"One word before I go, Bill," said Hathaway. "I feel better now than I have for ten years, for there is a little hope of a better life before me. And it seems like old times to have a long, swift ride before me with some honor in it."

"Now look out along the peaks to-night for lights. If you see some made on these hills and answered away up, most to the snow, build a fort, or get into a good canon, and stay till I come, for I will come. I've said it, and it's just as good as if I'd sworn it."

"I'll take your advice, but if you've an idea which way them chaps went, Red Leaf may get their hair yet."

"Right up the stream. They'll keep it till they get to its head, then branch south for Nick's Cavern."

Red Leaf heard the statement, and an approving glance from Buffalo Bill told him he could follow the fugitives. With but three warriors he rode west, just as Steve Hathaway started at full speed toward the east.

"What do you think of him, Jack?" asked Buffalo Bill, of the great Texan hunter, as their eyes followed the white rider.

"He'll do to bet on. He took the prospect of dying too easy to tell a lie in this business. He'll get to the fort as fast as horseflesh can carry him."

"I am sure of it—was, or I would not have trusted him. And now, mount all, and we'll take the trail. I'll cut an arrow mark on this tree for our course, and if I forget it, don't you, to have the same mark made on a rock or tree every chance we have."

"I shall not forget it," said Texas Jack.

"Is Dove Eye ready to ride?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes; when Long Rifle moves she is ready," said the Lodge Queen, springing upon her horse.

"Kionee has two more scalps in his belt," said Buffalo Bill, noticing the trophies for the first time.

"Yes," said the Indian boy, proudly; "and I killed the men who wore them. They came for the horses, and I shot and scalped them. When Spotted Tail sees these he will call me a boy no more. He will tell me that I am a brave—may have my own lodge, and my own squaw."

Buffalo Bill did not laugh, though he wanted to do so, for the boy was not more than fifteen or sixteen at most; but to have laughed at him in that moment of his triumph would have either caused his mortal enmity or else the boy would have been so broken in spirit by the levity of a great warrior like Long Rifle, that he would not have held his head up again on the whole trip.

The day was well advanced when Buffalo Bill once more took the trail made by Snap Carter, and the two girls.

The scout seemed to feel that the girls were less in peril than at first, and that it would be better for them not to press the pursuit too hard, so as to drive the man who had time in his power to seek the aid and company of worse men than himself.

So he rode on till dark, and then camped in a quiet, well-sheltered nook in the hills, with good grass and water near by for his animals.

Overton took the delay hard, for he was an amateur in such work and he was hopelessly smitten with that "beautiful handwriting."

A little after midnight there was an alarm in camp, but it soon subsided.

It was caused by the approach of Red Leaf and his three warriors.

The chief had two fresh scalps upon his spear. He,

pointed to these when he approached Buffalo Bill, and that was all the report that he made. Nothing more was necessary.

The scout knew that no signal fires would be lighted on the hill-tops that night. So he returned to the blanket which he had left, ready to sleep.

Overton, who shared his blanket beneath the wide-spread branches of a pine, was awake and not sleepy when Bill came back. He got to talking about the girls ahead and the girls back in the great city, till Buffalo Bill grew almost morose and told him to roll over and go to sleep.

The latter rolled over, but he could not sleep. There were so many strange noises in the air. Animals howled, or screeched away up in the hills, and then he had some kind of a fancy that they were in danger.

"What's that?" he asked, as a shrill, strange cry reached his ear, not far away, but off to the east of them.

"A screech owl! I wish you had a dozen caged alongside of you! Why can't you let me sleep?" said Bill.

"I heard one just like it while you were talking to Red Leaf over here," said Overton, and he pointed west. "There—hear that!"

The owls seemed to be holding a concert or to have taken post on all sides of the camp, for now another and then another was heard in a different quarter.

Buffalo Bill, who had been so sleepy, suddenly became more wakeful.

There was something in the uniformity of those sounds that he didn't like.

He arose, listened a few seconds, while Overton watched him with curiosity, for Bill did not speak.

Again, commencing in one quarter the owls were heard, seeming to answer in regular cadence, all around the camp.

"What is the matter?" asked Overton, for he saw Red Leaf coming toward Buffalo Bill, as he thought, but the Indian was doing something else, stranger still to Overton.

He brought a blanket, wet from the brook near by, and laid it on the blazing brands of the camp-fire, suddenly extinguishing the light, which had made all their forms visible to each other.

"What did he do that for?" asked Overton, astonished at the sudden action and rather put out by the darkness.

"Hush! Get your belt about you, for you took it off when you lay down. We scouts keep our tools on when we sleep. Hark! Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear the owls. You're trying to scare me, but you can't come it, old boy."

"You'll be worse scared if I am not mistaken, in less than ten minutes than you ever were. The cusses only wait for moonrise."

"What cusses?"

There was no need of an answer from Buffalo Bill, for at the very moment Overton spoke, it seemed as if the whole air was filled with yelling demons on every side, while the horses of the party, started from their feeding ground, came tearing through the camp to the infinite peril of those who were there, and then swept away in the wild terror of a stampede.

"Indians! Indians in earnest!" cried Overton.

He got no answer—for Buffalo Bill, rallying scouts and warriors, was busy, as shot, and yell, and whistling balls filled Overton's ears with the music of a real fight.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WEARY TRAVEL ON FOOT.

"Nothing but infernal Utes and horse-thieves," cried Buffalo Bill, angrily, when almost as suddenly as the attack commenced it ceased.

The horses were gone, the moon was not yet up, and though a few rattling shots had been fired on all sides, to make it appear that a real and heavy attack was coming from an immense body of Indians, it was only done to cover the bold and adroit plan to take all the horses of the party.

It might have been done by less than twenty Indians, but these were skilled in the business. For it is with some tribes almost a trade, and some are far more skillful than

others in it. The Comanche and the Apache Indians beat the world at it, while the Utes are almost as good.

In this case, by well-arranged signals, they had got the horses surrounded, ready for a stampede, before their presence was discovered, even by Red Leaf, and when ready they did their work so quickly and so well that without killing a man among those they robbed, they most likely got off without losing a man themselves.

"We're in a pretty fix now," muttered Buffalo Bill, when the rising moon gave them not a glimpse of a horse in sight. "These hounds, counting us and our horses before dark, most likely have got all our stock, and now should they or their main gang want our hair, they'll come after it at their leisure, knowing we can't do much afoot in the way of travel."

"I'm willing to follow the trail on foot," said Overton, eagerly.

"You wouldn't be after your feet got blistered, or you had stuck a few prickly pear thorns through those thir boots of yours," said Bill. "If we were farther south, in the region which Dashing Charlie roams over, we could get horses. Now we will have to wait for help from the fort, or else keep on till we can try the steal for ourselves."

"I'd like to know whom we would steal from," said Overton, full of gloom. "I guess you'll get me out on the plains again. If these are the good times you were going to give me—thank you. I won't take any more."

"Don't get sick yet," said Buffalo Bill, laughing. "The fun has only commenced. If we only get one good square fight so you can get your hand in you'll like it better. We haven't had any starving yet—nor even gone dry for eight-and-forty hours. Why, man, you haven't seen anything worth talking about yet."

"Then I hope the real show will soon commence. I've been almost in one fight, then killed my man in another, and now we've had our horses all stolen by the Indians, and yet I've seen nothing for one who hasn't been on the plains a week. When will something turn up?"

"When you find the girl who wrote that beautiful letter."

"You're right. And, Bill, I'm going for her, if I have to go alone."

And Overton took up his rifle, tightened his belt, and actually looked as if he meant to make the trial.

"Hold on, Overton. Don't be foolish. When it is daylight we'll all move on together, for there's no use in staying here. And to add to the chances of our success, I will get Red Leaf to pick out half a dozen of his best runners to go ahead and keep the trail as warm as we can."

"Keep the trail warm? Why don't you talk English that a fellow can understand. What do you mean by it?"

"Follow it as close as you can, and if the parties camp or make any turn by which we can shorten our route to cut them off, one of the runners will drop back to let us know."

"Now I understand you. May I light a cigar?"

"To be sure you can. All the mischief is over that we'll be apt to meet this night. Smoke or sleep—it is all the same—till the dawn of day. Then we'll eat—cache* our saddles and bridles, and the arms and ammunition taken from the fellows we wiped out, and go ahead."

Overton made no reply. He was perhaps thinking of the comforts that he had left behind him while he smoked that cigar.

Then he dropped back on the blanket and slept till the dawn of day. When he woke coffee was made and breakfast ready—the last good breakfast, Bill told him, he'd be apt to get for some time, for they would now have to move in "light marching order," leaving cooking utensils and the extras all behind.

They would have all they could carry if they took one blanket apiece and their arms and ammunition.

Overton ate heartily, for he had gained an appetite in spite of the rough fare and much exercise, but he was ready when the rest were.

They had a weary march that day, but they followed the trail all the time, and just at night reached a good place for camping, where, by the looks of the ground, Snap Carter and the girls had halted to rest, and let their horses feed.

* Bury or conceal.

"The girls seem free to go and come as they please," said Buffalo Bill, as he pointed out their tracks in several places where they had been wandering around picking up wild flowers, as could be seen by some they dropped.

The tracks were by themselves, while the man seemed to have staid to watch the horses.

"They must be more contented than they were, or we would find another letter," said Overton.

The latter was too tired with his long day's march to say a word against camping when night came on, but not too tired to smoke his cigar, and have a good chat after he had taken a hearty supper off a prairie hen roasted over the coals, for the bird was killed by his own gun.

Six Indians, fast runners, had started ahead quite early in the day, and Buffalo Bill argued from the trail they left here that they believed they would overtake the fugitives soon, for the tracks kept right on, showing that they made no halt here.

These Indians had been particularly instructed not to hurt Snap Carter, except in case of deadly resistance, if they overtook him, but to show a white flag, and to inform the girls who were on their trail, and what they were coming for, and to assure Carter he would not be hurt if he did not resist, and surrendered his captives peaceably.

For of his good intentions toward them no certain information had reached Buffalo Bill.

There was no disturbance this night in camp, though Buffalo Bill and Red Leaf were both sure of having seen Indians during the day, and in consequence kept one-fourth of the party on guard in turns during the night. Overton, like a true soldier, insisting on taking his turn as a sentinel.

At early dawn they were again in motion, but they were soon destined to a new surprise.

Instead of keeping to the hills Snap Carter, after passing beyond this spur, perhaps a couple or three miles beyond his last halting-place, took a short turn east, and headed away toward what Buffalo Bill said would be the hills at the head of the Loup.

To reach the timber and grass of that region, however, he would have at least two days' ride, and it would be over an open and a hard country for footmen especially, for the prickly-pear patches were thick on every side.

"I can't see into this," said the scout. "Snap Carter must be trying to avoid his own people, or he would not take this route and leave the hills. If he intends to strike the Loup he'll very likely travel as long as he can see by day, and start again with the rise of the moon, for it is over level ground nearly, and it's a hard, dry route for man and beast. But we'll soon know, for if he doesn't take a back turn soon we may be sure he is making for the Loup, as it looks here. That is the nearest water way."

"We'll never overtake him on foot," said Overton, with a sigh.

"Not without the Indian runners halt him. But there is one thing I like. This route runs back toward the one we came on, until we overtook the Herbesons at the time they were attacked. If he keeps it I shall send a runner across to that trail, and save the troops at least one or two days' march and time in getting to us—that is if we should need them at all. Ah! there comes a runner—now we'll know what is what. He never would return without some important news."

The Indian, one of the six sent before, came back on the trail to tell Buffalo Bill and Red Leaf that the trail of the three horses, after striking directly east had come upon the tracks of a large body of Indian ponies going south, and had made for the hills again. To save the others a longer foot journey this runner had been sent back, so that the course of the three horses might be intercepted quicker by keeping along the base of the hills.

"They've come upon the trail of that band of Snake Indians," said Buffalo Bill when he heard the report, "and they have been scared back off the route they meant to take. It will help our chances to overtake them, even if we are on foot."

He instantly gave orders to change the course, so as to range the base of the hills again—both himself and Red Leaf now looking out constantly for a sight or a sign of those whom they pursued.

Another long and weary day, hot, close, and sultry, made foot-travel rather a nuisance even to the hardy scouts.

Overton, no doubt, felt it, but so long as Dove Eye could trudge along with a smile on her face he was too much of a man to complain.

Buffalo Bill tried to lessen his load by offering to carry his rifle or to have it carried, but the New Yorker was too much a son of America to let another man carry his tools. He said he wasn't going to do anything yet which would make "Uncle Ned" laugh at him when he got back.

At nightfall, when all were glad to come to a halt, the trail of the three horses was found again, and, just as it was found, the Indian runners, who had taken a much longer route, came to the main column.

Buffalo Bill told Red Leaf to bid his men rest till morning, for, now that they were in the hills, most likely Snap Carter would not press his speed as he had done.

In truth he felt almost sure that a slender column of smoke, seen for a little while in the hills south of them and not very far off, was made by a fire lighted by Carter.

But the whole party, unused to foot-travel, were so tired that the true-hearted scout would not try to urge them on.

But could he have traversed that space, and known what terrible peril now darkened above the heads of those helpless girls, neither he nor a man in his party would have remained an instant where they were, but would have pressed on in spite of all their fatigue, so long as one foot could be dragged before another.

Buffalo Bill was too old a scout to build a fire without an actual necessity, and not having coffee to boil or meat to cook that night, he merely posted his sentinels, and then those not on guard dropped down to sleep, for the leader said he would start at day-dawn.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CARTER SURPRISED.

For all the first day Snap Carter and the two sisters traveled in comparative comfort, though fast, and when they halted or camped, the man was as attentive and kind as a brother could be, yet respectful as a servant in words and manner. He seemed to have thrown aside all his former insolent bravado; to have dropped his coarse, rude language; to have changed in every way.

The very fact that the girls now trusted to him, depended on his honor and his manhood, had much to do with this.

On the second day he told them, after they had journeyed some distance along the hill route, that he was about to run a great risk—not for them, but for himself.

"I am known in every railroad town," he said, "a reward has been offered for me dead or alive, but I shall take you to some point where you can be placed on a train that will take you east to the bounds of civilization. If your father lives you will hear from him and find him. When once you are safe I care not what becomes of me. Bad as I have been I am an outlaw forever, and can never hope to be otherwise; but there is room in the wilderness even to live without doing more evil, and room to die when my time comes. If I can see you safe in good hands, I will return, not to my old haunts or bad companions, but to the plains or mountains to hide away from the face of man, and repenting of the past, live till I am called from the world by the Master of Life."

The girls hardly knew what to say, so, wisely, they were silent till he went on with his plans.

"I shall turn east," said he, "leaving the hills altogether, and follow a route which will give us water, grass for our horses, and wood for our camps at night, till I strike the great railroad. Then my task will be done, and my heart relieved of one duty, while when I part from you all the sunshine will go with you."

Soon after saying this he turned from the hills, and now he urged the horses forward swiftly, for he said they had far to go before they would reach water.

The sisters, though tired, buoyed up now with hope, forbore to utter a word of complaint, but trying to make him cheerful with smiles and a kind word dropped now and

then, rode on.

Suddenly Carter halted, turned pale, and while he pointed down, he said:

"We must yet keep to the hills. A large body of Indians have just passed here, whether on the war-path or for a grand hunt, I cannot tell. They, too, bend for the timber where I hoped to find out first rest and shelter. I dare not go on. I can at least care for you and conceal you better in the hills till I can take some safer route."

The girls, terrified when they saw his alarm, were willing to go where he thought it would be safest, so his route was at once changed.

He rode now as rapidly toward as he had come from the hills, and though it was near night when he reached them, he rode fully two leagues on in the edge of the timber-range before he camped.

Then only did he realize how he had overtaxed the strength of the sisters by that long, swift ride, for much excited all day, he had given less than usual attention to their looks.

Susie fell in a dead faint when he lifted her from the saddle, and Lottie had hardly strength to assist in restoring her to consciousness.

Alarmed, thoughtless of the peril, Carter quickly lighted a fire, and in his tin-cup boiled some water and made tea from a little store in his haversack, then he caught some trout from a stream which ran by the camp, and broiled them on the coals.

For he knew that hunger as well as exhaustion was the cause of such weakness, for all day they had ridden fast without food.

He was used to such abstinence, and did not mind it, but they had been tenderly reared, and were unused to hardship.

When they had supped and drank some of his strong tea the girls felt better, and yet they were only too glad when he arranged a bed for them under a low, leafy pine.

He, too, was tired, but he carefully hobbled his horses in a rich patch of grass near by, and then, thinking that it was rather perilous to have a fire burning on a spot exposed to view, at least from one side, for the open plains spread to the east, he put it out.

By this time night had fairly set in, and thinking that he must be safe at least now from pursuit, for he had looked back a great deal and seen no sign of beast or man, he believed he could himself take a little rest, for never did man need it more.

After seeing once more that the horses were well secured and feeding quietly, he returned to the camp, and selecting a spot near the tree beneath which the girls were sleeping, he lay down, his weapons all belted to his side and his rifle in his hands.

It is scarce to be wondered that he almost instantly fell into the deep, almost unnatural sleep which continued unrest and fatigue superinduce, and from which it is hard to waken until tired nature is relieved and regains her powers.

So it was, and thus he slept when he should have awakened, at that most dangerous hour, the twilight of the coming day. For if a serious attack is to be made by Indians nine times out of ten they will choose that hour; first, because watchers who do not know their ways are apt to be careless and think the danger is over for the night; next, because after the massacre and scattering made easy by surprise, is over, search for plunder and the pursuit of any who have escaped, will be added by the clear light of early morning.

Light was breaking when Snap Carter was awakened by feeling some one handling his person, and in a second he realized that an attempt was being made to tie him, and that already thongs were about his feet, and were being passed about his arms and body.

In a second his left hand grasped the hilt of his heavy bowie-knife, and it was drawn at the instant he opened his eyes, and with an upward sweep he drove it home into the huge Indian warrior who was bending over to secure his arms, while another was finishing the same work at his legs.

A yell broke from the lips of the Indian, and in a second it was answered by a dozen more, while Carter bravely

struck out at the second warrior, and tried to free his legs so as to rise, for he was clenched by the first Indian in the death-grasp.

The struggle was fierce, but short, for though he fought desperately, killing one and wounding the other Indian, there were more upon him in a second, and a crushing blow from a hatchet dropped him powerless to the earth, while with fiendish ferocity the Indian whom he had wounded by his second blow tore the knife from his helpless hand and drove it again and again into his body.

All this was seen by the horror-stricken girls, who, wakened by the terrible yells, found themselves surrounded by a band of painted and savage Indians, who were yelling madly over their dead comrade and his wounded mate, while Carter lay gasping, dying before their eyes.

Too much terrified to speak, utterly helpless, the poor girls expected every second that the death-blows would also fall on them. And they had heard such terrible tales of Indian atrocity that they would not have shrunk for a second from leveled gun or descending knife or hatchet.

But they were not to die then.

An Indian, who by dress and looks seemed superior to the rest, said, speaking in broken English:

"Keep still. Me no kill women. Pale-face squaws keep still. Eat, quick—have big ride all soon."

Then food was offered to them.

But not even to satisfy the savages could they swallow a morsel of the half-cooked meat tendered by their captors. They were in truth so shocked by the sight of Carter's mangled body, so terrified as they looked on the savage, merciless faces around them, that they were more dead than alive.

They saw the arms which Carter wore taken and distributed among his captors, and then the horses were brought up, their own and quite a large band more, which their captors seemed to own.

The girls were again placed in their saddles, and a little after sunrise the Indian cavalcade, heading right across the plains, dashed away at a gallop.

Soon after they left the hills Lottie saw the Indians looking back, talking in their own tongue, and seeming to show triumphant joy in their looks. Looking back to see the reason of their looks and actions, she felt sure that she saw a body of men in the timber at the edge of the hills, but they were not mounted.

Then the thought, and it was correctly founded, came to her that these Indians had robbed that party of their horses, and thus rendered pursuit hopeless, for there were more in the hills in sight, twice over, than there were Indians in the band of her captors.

These were only about a dozen in number, stout, active warriors under the leadership of an elder brave, whose scars gave evidence of his prowess.

"Where do you go? Why do you runaway from your enemies?" asked Lottie of this Indian, for an intuitive feeling told her the men seen in the hills were those who had been trying to save her and her sister.

"Keep still. Women know nothing. By and by see heap more warriors. Then me go back and get more scalps. Only one now."

The wretch dangled Carter's scalp before her eyes on his spear point.

And the Indian turned to look back again toward the hills.

Lottie looked, too, and she was almost sure, though they were now so far off, that she saw a body of men coming from the hills in the same direction that they were going.

But she did not speak of it even to her sister. If that party had no horses, how could they ever overtake those who had. That seemed impossible.

The Indians rode fast, but not so fast as to tire out their horses, which they seemed to care for quite as much as for themselves, and, after leaving the hills far behind, they went slower than at first, still heading east.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HIS LAST WORDS.

Rested, with an undisturbed night, Overton awoke just before dawn, to find the camp already astir, and Buffalo Bill broiling him a bit of antelope steak for an early breakfast.

For the scout had been thinking of that last discovered smoke half the night, and he was determined to find out at a very early hour what made it.

In the gray of the coming day the march was taken up, and leaving the slowest to follow at their best pace, Red Leaf and his braves, with Buffalo Bill, went on at a run.

Overton wanted to try the pace, but Bill gave him two reasons why he should not.

The first, because he could not; the second, that it would be very ungallant to leave the beautiful Dove Eye without a gentleman escort.

When Buffalo Bill and Red Leaf, side by side, approached the foot of the hill where they had seen the smoke the night before, they saw on the plains to the east a large band of horses moving, and some mounted Indians with them, but their attention was, a moment later, attracted by another sight directly before them.

A wounded man, scalped and dreadfully cut up, had crawled to the brink of a small stream, to either wash his wounds or drink, and now he tried to rise when he heard their steps, but he could not. He fell back, helpless, and fast dying.

Buffalo Bill saw that he was white, and, rushing up, cried out:

"Who are you, man? How did this come about?"

"I'm all that's left of Snap Carter. Don't bother for me, but try to save them girls. I was doin' my level best to get 'em back safe, but the reds took me onawares, and I'm about done for."

"The Indians, then, riding east have got them? We cannot follow. Our horses are all stolen."

"Yes, yes; you'll find horses—lots of 'em—if you're smart, at the head of Crow. Save them girls if you can, and tell 'em Snap Carter died thinkin' of them and his sister. Oh!—it's hard to go where I'm goin', with such a load on! but—but—"

The man dropped back, and Bill thought he was dead.

But he revived a little, as the scout raised his head, and poured water over his brow from the palm of his hand dipped in the stream.

"You've been kind to them girls?" asked Bill, when he saw the man's blue eyes open again.

"Yes, a born devil couldn't hurt them. But do—do get them away from the Indians."

"How without horses?" cried Bill, as much worried as the dying man seemed to be.

"Tisn't a day, even afoot, from here to the head of Crow. Get horses there—a big lot that we uns have kept in reserve. Half a dozen men herd 'em—long canon, and then an open—you'll find it. I'm not lying."

"Red Leaf knows the place," said the chief.

"Then go—go, and save—oh, my sister—mother—it's all up!"

It was all up with him, for with another quivering gasp, Snap Carter died.

Buffalo Bill laid the head tenderly down on the mossy brink of the stream, and arose.

"A fellow who thinks of his mother and sister when he is dying can't be all bad," he said. "And one who has been kind to helpless girls has some good in him, no matter what he has been. Snap Carter, you're gone, and I've heard a heap about the evil you've wrought, but I'll see you buried decently before I leave you. What tribe, Red Leaf?"

The last question was addressed to the Sioux chief who had just discovered the body of the Indian that Carter had killed, hidden under a pile of brush which the warriors had thrown over it before they rode away.

"Dog!—soldier! Cheyenne!" said Red Leaf. "Big horse-thief—I know him! The pale-face killed him while the Indain tried to tie him—look!"

And Red Leaf showed a thong of raw hide yet clenched

in the Indian's death-stiffened hand.

"Yes; Snap Carter got his death wounds fighting. But we've no time to talk. Do you know where the head of the Crow lays from here?"

"Yes, Red Leaf and his braves can be there before the sun begins to go down hill, if we go alone. For we can run faster than the pale faces—faster even than Long Rifle."

"Then go—and the Great Spirit help you—go and get horses—all you can for our party."

Red Leaf spoke but one word to his braves; the next instant he and they were out of sight, running through a pass in the hills that led nearly northwest.

When Overton, Dove Eye, and the scouts who were left behind under Texas Jack came up, they found Buffalo Bill alone, sitting by the side of the dead white man.

Overton shuddered at the sight, but his anxiety about the girls mastered every other thought.

"Where are the girls?" he asked. "Weren't they here?"

"Yes, but they are gone again, and most like in worse hands than ever. The Cheyenne Indians have them now. This brave man died trying to save them. He was alive when I got here, but died a little while ago."

"Alive! cut up and scalped so?"

"Yes, and lived to tell me where we could get horses. Red Leaf has gone for them, and by midnight I hope we shall have something to ride."

"Then we can yet follow and save the girls!" cried Overton, eagerly.

"Kionee, there's another scalp for you!" said Buffalo Bill, as the young Sioux strode up, carrying the blankets that he had kept for Dove Eye to sleep upon.

"Kionee will only take the scalps of them that he kills," said the young Indian, proudly. "Let the Cheyenne dog wear his scalp."

"You're gettin' more particular than most of your race!" muttered Texas Jack.

Then, turning to Buffalo Bill, he asked:

"What next, boss, which way?"

"We'll remain here and rest till Red Leaf brings the horses he has gone after," answered the scout. "And as soon as you've rested we will dig a grave and bury Snap Carter decently, and put a pyramid of stones over him."

"A heap of pains for an outlaw and a murderer!" said Texas Jack, carelessly.

"Jack, about the last words on that chap's lips were 'mother' and 'sister.' A fellow who could think of them when he was going off don't deserve to be left to the coyotes or the wolves."

"No mate. You're right, and I'll help to bury him," said the hunter.

And the scouts all went to work soon after, and, beneath the very pine where the two girls had been sleeping, poor Carter was buried as decently as it could be done with the tools they had to work with.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LOTTIE'S PERIL.

"Ugh! Pale-face squaws tired?" said the old warrior in charge of the band that had the girls in their possession, after they had ridden for hours in almost an easterly course, as they knew by the sun.

Susie made no answer, for she was too terrified to speak. There was a deadly, brutal hate in the look of the Indian that chilled her soul. But Lottie, some way of sterner mold, said:

"We are women, but we are strong. The red man is as tired as we."

"Ugh! You speak strong, you look weak. See trees there?"

And he pointed to a range of timber, which had been in sight some time.

"Yes. I am not blind."

"Good! We camp there. Eat, drink, and sleep, maybe. How squaw like that?"

"She don't want to camp. She would like to ride all night. She loves to ride," said Lottie, who had good reason to dread the thought of camping while in the power of those hideous wretches.

"Ugh! Pale-face squaw speak a big lie! She is afraid of Oconee the Scalp-taker."

"Why don't you say Oconee, the horse-stealer?" said the spunky girl, pointing to the band of horses.

The Indian grinned. That was as near as he could come to a laugh.

"Yes, Oconee smart," he answered. "He steal a heap horses. Steal from pale face and Indian two nights ago—all these. He go to look for more when he see smoke. Then he come back—he find pale-face squaws asleep, and one pale-face man asleep. He catch girls and then he kills pale-face man."

"Not till he killed one for you and most killed another," said Lottie, indignantly.

"Ugh! Look at his scalp," said the wretch, and again he flaunted the bloody trophy before her eyes.

"Why don't you kill me and take mine, you big coward!" cried the bold girl, determined to provoke him to kill her, rather than to meet a fate more horrible.

"Ugh! You heap handsome. Me no kill you. Make Indian heap nice wife!"

"You'll find yourself a dead Indian before I'm a live Indian's wife," said Lottie.

"Oh, sister, don't anger him!" said Susie, terrified, when she saw the fiery flash of the Indian's eye.

"Susie, keep still. Better to die at his hands than—Oh, merciful Heaven, look there!"

The Indians had been approaching one of those willow clumps which start up here and there on the plains, almost always revealing the presence of a living stream or spring, until they were now within a long rifle shot of it, and then the sight which Lottie saw was a body of well-mounted Indians riding out from behind it.

In a second the Cheyennes saw that these were warriors from a strange tribe—another second seemed to tell that they were hostile; and quick as thought they turned their horses—those which they rode and those of the girls also—and fled back over the route they had just come.

Lashing and spurring their horses to terrific flight, they flew over the prairie, while Lottie, glancing back, saw the Indians that came from behind the willows scatter and separate, some to capture the loose horses, others still to follow up the chase.

She watched it, the chase, almost without interest, for it was as bad to be captured by those pursuing as to remain with those pursued; but when she saw the former gaining fast, and then saw the Cheyenne who rode close to her draw an arrow from his quiver, and look fiercely at her, she remembered that she had heard Snap Carter say an Indian would always kill a female captive rather than let her live and fall into other hands.

So, though nearly breathless from the speed at which they were rushed along, she said to her sister:

"Susie, say your prayers—we're going to die now. These Indians will kill us if they cannot get away from the others, and I know they can't. Those who follow gain every minute."

Susie groaned. Hers was but a weak spirit to meet such terrors.

—But Lottie, even more calm now than before this last peril came, only looked back at the Indians who pursued, and then at the hateful, fiendish look of the wretch who rode close beside her, while two of his warriors madly lashed on the horses which the girls rode, as if possibly yet their pursuers would give up a chase which had scattered them so far from their starting point.

Lottie saw that more than double as many as the Cheyenne band were on the trail; she saw they gained fast, that they were actually within rifle-shot. Then she heard a guttural cry break from the lips of her captor, and turning to look, she saw his bow full bent, the arrow aimed directly for her heart.

"Boots and saddles," rang out clear and loud from the bugles in front of cavalry headquarters at Fort McPherson, a few days after Buffalo Bill and his scouts had left for Spotted Tail's camp.

The report had just reached the commandant that some Indians had made a dash on a corral near the fort during the night previous, and had run off all the best horses from a valuable stock owned by citizens.

To send troops after them, when Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack were away was almost hopeless, for experienced scouts and guides were required to trail the red men on the plains, but the officer in command at the time was not one to neglect duty, and he instantly ordered a couple of companies to follow the Indians, punish them, and recover the stock if possible.

The excitement about the fort was only temporary, and soon everything went quiet as before.

A few of the post officers were engaged in the club billiard room, others at their quarters reading, while the splendid Third Cavalry band was practicing a new piece, the "Buffalo Bill Gallopade," when the train that had been to Spotted Tail's camp returned.

The sergeant in command reported where he had left Buffalo Bill, Mr. Overton, and the small escort, also the duty they had gone upon, and pointed out Mr. Herbeson in the ambulance, yet very feeble and unable to rise, as the wounded survivor of the massacre detailed in Buffalo Bill's written report.

Gen. Reynolds spoke some words of kindness to the bereaved sufferer, and then ordered his removal to quarters even more comfortable than the hospital. Then he turned to read the written report sent in by Buffalo Bill.

While he was doing this a man rode into the square in front of headquarters, on a horse that was just able to stand when he got in, and which fell as the rider leaped to the ground.

The general and the other officers looked at the strange rider with astonishment. He was dressed more like an Indian than a white man, but he was white, and he looked as if he had literally ridden until he was nearly dead.

"Who commands here?" he gasped. "That is for him."

He handed a paper all soiled with dust and sweat to the nearest officer, and then turned to the grass-plot in front of the quarters, and dropped from sheer exhaustion.

"Get that man some refreshment. He needs it. He is a messenger from Buffalo Bill," said the general.

Then while an officer went to dispatch a servant with food and drink for the exhausted man, the general read with difficulty what Buffalo Bill had written under such strange circumstances—the letter not having been bettered in its legibility by the way it was carried.

"You are Steve Hathaway?" said the general.

"Yes, sir."

"You have had a hard ride?"

"Pretty rough. Two horses gone. The other dropped at the Platte where I crossed, and this will never be good for anything. But I'm here, sir, and ready to go back when you send him help. I'll be fit for the saddle in half an hour again."

"You think that Buffalo Bill will need help?"

"I know it, general, and that speedily. He is in the worst country this side of the mountains. Indians, horse-thieves, and murderers are thick there, and he is going right into the thickest of them."

"What do you say, Captain Meinhold—would you like to take Company B, under this man's guidance, and try to aid our brave scouts, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, who seek to rescue that old man's daughters from death, or a worse fate?"

"I shall only be too glad to go, general," said the brave captain.

"Then make ready at once, with only what feed and rations you can carry mounted."

"All right, general. Lieutenant Lawson, mount the company at once—three days' cooked rations, and six feeds for the horses—grass must do the rest."

A young and dashing lieutenant hurried off on receiving this order, and in a few seconds "boots and saddles" sounded for Company B.

"A fresh horse and rations for this man, too!" said the captain, as his lieutenant came to report the company mounting.

The general now questioned Hathaway more fully about Buffalo Bill and his plans, but Steve had few answers to make.

He could guide the relief to Buffalo Bill; he would do it faithfully. He would then have done his part, for Buffalo Bill knew the country well. What he didn't know, Hathaway said, was not worth knowing.

The man had nothing to say about himself or his past life, only that he and Buffalo Bill were once mates, and on the same service when the "Overland" run.

It took a little longer to get Company B ready, because rations and feed had to be packed; but in an hour, much refreshed and rested, Steve Hathaway rode with them from the square inside of Fort McPherson, on his way to rejoin Buffalo Bill.

"We'll have to keep up to all the horses can do to reach him in time to do him good, cap'n," said Steve, as he rode on. "I expect that even now they're shut up in a gorge fighting, or that Bill has made a fort in some canon to hold his own. There were two chaps going from him when I left, that could bring two hundred cusses, red and white, on his trail long before we can get there, and Bill isn't going to turn back, even if he knows they're coming."

"We'll make the best time we can and not kill our horses," said the captain, curtly, for he didn't like the looks of Hathaway.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SLEEPING IN PEACE.

When Lottie saw the fiend-look in that Indian's hideous face, and saw him draw back the arrow with his full strength, she closed her eyes and said:

"God be merciful to me!"

For she thought she would be dead before any other word could ever leave her lips, and she waited for the icy chill of the death-shot. A second passed, and she looked again for the chief, or whatever the Cheyenne might be, to know why he staid his hand.

She saw no Indian to her right or left; only Susie was there. But, looking back, she saw some of the strange Indians pressing close upon her, while others were scalping some dead Indians farther back.

In that brief minute her late captors and persecutors had the tables of death turned upon themselves, he who would have killed her receiving a death-shot which paralyzed the arm that would have sent an arrow to her heart.

All was done so quickly that Lottie and Susie hardly realized that there was a change of captors, until she was told, in very good English, to stop her horse, by an Indian of far nobler mien than any she had yet seen.

She stopped her horse; an easy task, for the animal was nearly run down.

The horse which Susie rode stopped when the other did, and then the two girls were approached by the Indian who had spoken.

He was evidently a chief, for the other warriors checked their horses and held back, while he rode forward, and with a bold dignity in look and tone, spoke:

"Why were the pale-face girls with the dog-soldiers of the Cheyenne? Let them speak. The ears of Marmora, the King of the Wasatch, are open to hear."

"Because we could not help it. They killed our only friend and protector, and we were their prisoners," said Lottie, studying the face of the chief while she spoke, to see if there was hope of release from captivity now.

"They are dead. Their scalps hang at the belts of Ute braves," said the chief.

"They deserved to die; they were murderers and thieves!" said Lottie boldly. "What does Marmora mean to do now that he has rescued us from these bad Indians? He must be a friend to the pale-faces, he speaks their language so well."

"He is a friend to some pale-faces. But they live near the great lake that is salt, and they pay tribute for his friendship. They live on the land that is Marmora's, and he lets them stay there because they hate the pale faces of the Sunrise-land, and do not love the Great Father who lives toward the Big Waters."

"You did not answer me. What do you mean to do with us? Speak plain and think no wrong, for the Great Spirit is our Friend, and we will go up to Him, if we are persecuted any more. We have seen sorrow till we are almost weary of life," said Lottie.

"The pale-face girl is too young to talk so. She is very beautiful. She shall go with her sister to the camp of Marmora, and then he will think before he speaks. When he has thought enough he will tell the pale-face girl what he will do."

Lottie knew well enough that she had no choice but to obey, and as he neither looked nor spoke in a cruel or brutal way, she turned back toward the willows, without a word, and Susie followed.

There they found a small but very comfortable camp, and when he had helped them from their horses, the chief pointed to where a large robe was drawn over some sticks as a kind of shelter from the dew.

"Go there, eat, and sleep, but do not try to go away, or you shall die!" he said, pointing to a pile of robes beneath it.

The girls at once went to the shelter and sat down, for night was coming on, and they were very, very tired.

The chief sat by himself, all apart from his warriors, near a little fire in the center of the willows, and it was only when an Indian rode in from the east and made some report to him—and several came during the evening—that he appeared to notice anything.

"He must be an Indian king!" said Lottie, "he is so dignified. I hope he will not take a fancy to make you or me his queen, Susie, for I don't fancy any color but my own."

"You are trying to make me laugh, sister," said poor Susie. "But you can't."

"I don't think it would be any laughing matter, Susie," said Lottie, demurely. "I don't think he means we shall have any supper to-night, from the way things look."

Evidently the chief heard what she said, and in his reverie had forgotten that they were hungry, or must be, as well as tired.

He spoke to a warrior in the Indian tongue, and in a few minutes a bountiful supply of cold roasted venison was laid before them on a white piece of willow bark, and by the side of it a great calabash full of water.

Lottie ate almost voraciously—she said she was so hungry. Susie ate also—not so heartily, but sufficient to give her strength.

Then the two girls nestled down in each other's arms, and went to sleep.

It was sunrise when they awoke, and it was the touch from the butt of a spear in Marmora's hand that awakened them.

"Get up and eat quick!" he said. "We have to ride far and fast."

Then Lottie saw that there was another band of the same kind of Indians, and another chief much younger than the first, near the camp. They appeared to have just come in from the east, for their horses were warm.

And Lottie noticed, too, that several of them had fresh Indian scalps fastened to their spears, and that some had wounds bandaged and yet crimson, as if freshly made.

But she had no time to see more, for the chief or king, Marmora, pointed to food and drink that was waiting for them, as they had received it the night before, and said:

"Eat. In a little while we must ride. Egaro, my brother, has been to battle with the Snakes from the north. They were strong. He took some scalps, but he lost more than he took. We must go to the hills, where more warriors wait for us—then we will come back, and not a Snake shall live to go back to his people."

"Why must we go to the hills? My sister and I are strong. We know the stars at night and the sun by day. We can go east till we find the iron road which will take us to our people," said Lottie.

The face of the chief was like bronze when he answered: "You will go where we go. Marmora has thought. He will take one, and Egaro shall take the other, and you will be wives to the great men of the proud Utes. Eat—for we will travel soon."

The chief turned away while Susie wept, but brave little Lottie pitched into the cold meat, and said to her sister, in a low tone:

"Eat, Susie—eat and grow strong. We have got to run away from these Indians before they try to marry us against our will."

Susie tried to eat, but it was hard work. But Lottie made a good square meal before the chief was ready to move.

When he was ready the girls were lifted to their saddles once more, and at the head of the cavalcade, the chief Marmora on one side and Egaro on the other.

In silence they rode for hours, bearing way, as Lottie thought, a little south of west until they reached the hills, and then it was so near night that they rode but a little way before they camped.

Then Marmora, who seemed to be a regular despot in his way, sent Egaro on with a small party on the freshest horses, upon some errand, the nature of which Lottie did not know, since the two chiefs talked always in their own tongue.

But this night, as on the night before, a shelter was reared for the girls, and they slept in peace, side by side.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A "BIG FIGHT" AHEAD.

Buffalo Bill knew that his foot sore and exhausted party could move no farther without horses, besides he depended on Steve Hathaway bringing troops up. Therefore, in such bad hands as he knew those poor girls to be, he had to let them "take their chances," as he said in his expressive way, "and trust to Providence," till he could get to them.

For he had no idea of giving up the chase and leaving them to their fate. There was too much true humanity in his noble nature for that. Overton, satisfied that the scout knew just what could be done, smoked his cigars and was as patient as he could be.

Dove Eye seemed most contented of all. She was where she could look upon Long Rifle, hear his voice, and that seemed in her strange devotion, to be all she asked. She caused Kionee the Creeper to watch his eye and anticipate his every want—to cook his food, bring him water, and to serve him when he would be served.

Kionee did not like this as well as he did at first. For he had grown proud since he had taken two scalps from men of his own killing, and it hurt his dignity to wait upon any man now.

During the day Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack went out and killed each a couple of deer, so there was no dearth of meat in the camp, and some was cooked to carry along when the horses came.

For that Red Leaf would not get horses never came into the mind of Buffalo Bill. He knew if there were horses where Snap Carter had reported them they would be got.

So the day passed, and then the night came on and then even Buffalo Bill began to grow anxious.

For if successful, Red Leaf surely ought to be back by midnight.

The scout tried to make the rest sleep, but he could not. Overton would not, so the two sat and smoked, and talked in low tones about old times in New York, stopping now and then to listen for the expected tramp of horses, or the signal cry from the pickets posted well out from camp.

But the night came and day dawned before Red Leaf came.

He did come then, reporting that the white herders had a band of Ute Indians with them all the day before, and that while they were there there was no chance to get a horse away.

But a little before night the Utes rode off to the south,

and after giving them time to get out of hearing of him or his guns, if he had to fire, he closed in on the herders who had no suspicion of danger.

He had slain and scalped them all, and had done it so quick and still that he believed none escaped, and that no alarm reached other ears.

It was not till after midnight that this was done, and horses secured in a sufficient number to mount all the party.

But they were there, and with a brief rest for Red Leaf and his men, while the horses also were fed all would be ready to once more take the trail.

Overton was again in good spirits, and forgot all about smoking while he picked out a horse, a vicious looking roan, which Buffalo Bill told him resembled Powder Face in all but the color.

There was one thing he didn't like, but that was another lesson in plains life. There was not a saddle for one of the party, and the bridles were but twisted halters of raw hide.

But that kind of horses did not require any grand accouterments to make them go—as Buffalo Bill said, they ran all the better for being stripped.

By the time the sun was an hour high they were off at a lope on the trail which the Cheyennes had left when they carried the girls away.

Before sunset they found the bodies of the Cheyennes scalped in an artistic way, and Texas Jack, who seemed to know all about every tribe on the plains, at once said it was done by the hands of Utes. How he could tell he would not say—it was a secret of his own.

The camp was examined, and the place seen where the girls seemed to have slept, for the print of two slender forms yet remained on the green grass that had been laid down beneath the blanket. But beyond it no sign except that the trail seemed to lead from there toward the hills.

Yet it was now too dark to follow it. There was but little grass, though water enough for the horses—but rest was necessary so another night had to be spent in waiting.

When day dawned Buffalo Bill was on the trail again, however, and now he felt sure that he would overtake the party that seemed to have captured the girls from the Cheyennes, for it was so large that it would not make any hurry to get out of the way.

As the route now taken seemed to lead back at an angle but a short distance from the old course, the brave scout detached two of his hunters to strike the route by which Steve Hathaway would be apt to bring the troops, so as to make him take a more direct cut for the hills in his guidance.

Buffalo Bill had peculiar marks which could be told by those who knew him, to show which course he took—just as he had marks for the buffalo he killed.

Thousands of buffalo heads along the line of the Kansas, Pacific and Union Railroads bear the hunters' marks as they bleach in the sun to this day, to mark where he was when he supplied thousand of their graders and track layers with their "daily meat."

These marked horns can be seen all over the plains, but more especially in the sections spoken of, where he used to average thirty and forty animals a day, every pound of meat being taken in and used.

The ride in toward the hills was unmarked by any incident of noteworthiness, but again Buffalo Bill had to camp without seeing the Indians or their captives, though he had pressed hard on them, for they had an entire day the start.

He had now to move warily. He knew that he was in a very bad country, liable to ambuscade, and he had to keep red and white scouts ahead and on either flank of his little party all the time.

But mounted once more, all were in better trim, and even Overton, with a blanket instead of a quilted saddle, said he enjoyed the ride, for now he had hope of seeing her who wrote the "beautiful hand."

He had seen the tracks of the sisters at every stopping-place, and like the scout, he hoped that so far they had been treated at least mercifully.

Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack found signs at the noon stopping-place on the second day after they had got their horses, that would have alarmed any other class of men,

and made most leaders turn back at once.

The body of Indians whom they had trailed was joined by another even larger than the first, and it now must number at the very least calculation, a hundred men, and perhaps double that number.

Buffalo Bill, as brave as the bravest, looked dubious when he saw this junction, but Texas Jack merely laughed, and said:

"Boss, if we have half a show, we can lay 'em out. What are a dozen reds to either you or I after breakfast?"

Overton was puzzled to understand what breakfast had to do with the matter, but he was destined to know, before he got through, that a man could fight longer and better when he wasn't hungry and had nothing else to think about.

Keeping warily on, Buffalo Bill became convinced that he would soon overtake the reds, for the trail freshened so fast that he knew they were traveling very slowly.

Suddenly he came to a pass in the hills, which intersected that by which they were traveling, and here they had another and not a pleasant surprise.

Another party of Indians had united with the main body, still swelling its ranks, and now all of them had suddenly faced east again by the new pass, and were heading once more toward the distant plains.

And what was more, they were now very near. They could not be more than two hours ahead, for the meat they had cooked and left half eaten around, showing how plentiful it was, seemed hardly cold.

"We'll have a bully fight before we're much older!" said Buffalo Bill, as with scouts and flankers well thrown out, he moved on cautiously again.

"Let it come! I'd like a change of some kind," said Overton, quietly. He had got settled to the work, and was taking things easy, like an old "vet."

CHAPTER XL.

MAKING PROGRESS.

Captain Meinhold was an old campaigner, and his lieutenant, the gallant Lawson, though younger in service, took to the work naturally. The first essential to a good troop was theirs. They had good horses, well seen to, and in fine order. Next, they had good men, well disciplined, who liked their officers, and consequently were ready to endure hardship and extra duty without a murmur.

Pushing on at night as well as by day, taking only such time to feed and rest as was actually needful, even Steve Hathaway was satisfied with the progress made.

On the third day out they had news from Buffalo Bill, for the scouts he had sent back met them, and now the order to "hurry up" did not require to be repeated. With the almost certainty of an Indian fight before them, the men snuffed the breeze as old war horses snuff the smoke of gun-powder. There was no hanging back now.

Taking a route which would lead direct to the hills west from the willow island, which the scouts described to Hathaway so well that he knew it at once, Steve told Captain Meinhold that they would see the tracks of Buffalo Bill, if nothing more, inside of twenty hours.

"We must, or stop to hunt—for our rations are out," said the officer.

"Men that can't go without eating twenty hours oughtn't to come on the plains," said Hathaway, as he rode on.

The course now lay directly over the almost boundless plains, with no water, except some half stagnant, now and then, in a buffalo wallow, and it was a weary route for men and horses. But toward night the blue of the hills once more greeted their eyes, and when at last the grateful evening air, so cool and pleasant, came, the hills were in full view.

A short halt at sunset by some poor water, and yet poorer grass, gave the animals and men a brief rest, and then the march was resumed, not to be broken by any ordinary circumstances until the hills and good water were reached.

This occurred after a night-long ride, just at day-dawn, and the two hunter scouts, riding ahead, had the good luck to come on a band of elk in the mouth of the pass,

which opened first before them.

Three of these were down before they could get out of shot, so meat was plentiful when they made their morning halt. Grass was good, too, so both men and horses had a chance to recuperate.

The two scouts, after a short rest, taking the course he meant to travel from Steve Hathaway, now started to find Buffalo Bill, and to carry to him the news that help was near at hand, if they could find the brave scout and his party.

Captain Meinhold, before they left, arranged a plan of smoke signal, which he would understand, and which would aid his movements—signals which would tell when and where Buffalo Bill was found, if he was fighting.

A halt of about three hours gave men and animals sufficient rest and feeding time to be quite ready for another rapid onward move.

It was now deemed best to skirt the base of the hills until the trail was found, as it might have been found, indeed, had they struck the hills farther north, but it would have been the old trail of days before.

Hathaway became more eager as they went on, for he felt confident that Buffalo Bill would have the prudence to wait, and therefore that they would soon join him, and his own good faith be proved.

For no matter how hard a man has been, if he has any chance to redeem his past or better his life, he will almost seize it eagerly and improve upon it.

About noon they came upon the trail, where Buffalo Bill and his party had come into the hills.

Captain Meinhold asked Steve how long it was since Bill had passed?

"The trail is cold. The night dew has fallen on it!" he said. "He must be a long way ahead, if he has not halted to wait for us. He is on a trail almost as fresh as his own. And a bigger crowd, twice over. If he and all with him are wiped out it is his fault. He should have waited for us, for I told him I'd guide you straight to his trail, and I've done it."

"Halt. There are smoke signals rising," said the captain. "They must be from the scouts who left us. Yes—three, quick smokes, at intervals of time in which one can count a hundred! That means a fight is going on. But there is a long, steady smoke of ten minutes' duration, to show that Buffalo Bill is there. They must have forgotten, or misunderstood me. Ah, there is another smoke—another, and another, but they are farther off!"

"And not made by them or their friends!" said Steve Hathaway. "Those last smokes come from the vicinity of Nick's Cavern."

"What or who is there?" asked Captain Meinhold.

"A gang of cut-throats and thieves, sir—the offscourings of humanity. They've seen these smokes, and they think they are signals from some of their own class. They'll be moving down to help them, too—and whoever is fighting, if they fight Buffalo Bill, will never get help from worse men than they are. They would risk their hair anytime to get his, or to wipe out anything else that is decent."

"Then we will move on. If there is a fight going on the sooner we get to it the better."

And the captain at once put his command to a trot.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FIGHT.

Lottie and Susie had been now three days in the power of the Ute chief, and so far, though closely watched and guarded, they had not been treated rudely. He seemed to have complete control over his braves, and, as band after band joined him in answer to scouts sent out or signal smokes, he soon had a very large party, this seemed remarkable.

For discipline in an Indian tribe is to be as much expected as it is in a new-recruited regiment of volunteers, where every private feels as big as his captain, and sometimes bigger, having no responsibility to settle him down.

But how long kind treatment would last the poor girls did not know, for the chief and his brother often spoke of them as their wives to be, when the war-tramp was ended.

For now, with his force augmented, the Wasatch chief was bold in his avowal to go back and take the trail of the Snakes who had fought Egaro, and to kill and scalp every one.

When he got within sight of the plains, upon a trail that led nearly back to where he had emerged from them, only one great clump of hills intervening, the eyes of the chief flashed with a glad fire.

"Now!" he cried, "the pale-face girls shall see how Ute warriors can fight. The Snakes are seeking us, and they will find us soon enough."

He pointed away to a plain at the foot of the hill-slope where they were, and the girls saw that a large band of Indians were indeed there, apparently well mounted and armed.

The keen eyes of the chief had detected at the instant he saw them that they were not of his tribe, and he knew that the Snakes would be sure to keep the war-path until the death of their braves had been avenged.

"We are strong now, and we will make a big fight," said Marmora. "We will not leave a single Snake dog alive to bark when we are gone. The pale-face girls shall see us fight. They shall see what brave men they will have for husbands."

Marmora now chose four braves, and giving them strict orders to guard the young girls, and to allow no harm to come too them, but to keep them safe till the fight was over, he posted them on the side of the hill beneath a lofty cliff, down which a small stream wound its silvery way in crystal beauty.

From thence they could look over all the plains below, and the coming fight would be decided before their eyes.

Perhaps there was, without his knowing it, a drop of ancient chivalric blood in the veins of the Ute chief. Hence his claim to the title of King of the Wasatch, and his desire to do battle before the eyes of the beautiful girl whom he had destined to share his throne or lodge-robes.

The girls, guarded by the braves, who did not understand their language, or appeared not to, spoke to each other freely as the Indians in column began to descend the hills, deploying farther down as they were discovered by the Snakes.

"If our horses had been left we might escape now," said Lottie, whose mind was ever busy studying how to get away from her captors.

The wily chief had had all the horses taken out of reach of both the captives and his enemies, except only those which he and his warriors rode as they went down to fight.

The fight soon began. The Utes forming a scattered line as they went nearer to where the Snakes were massed to receive them, closed but little when within rifle shot, but adopted the usual plan of circling around at a gallop and picking off the enemy at every chance.

The Snakes soon met this maneuver by extending their lines and charging here and there till the melee became so universal that the girls, now anxious witnesses of the battle, could hardly tell one band from the other, or know which was victorious.

All that they could see were mounted bands of Indians whirling here and there, striking and firing in terrible confusion, clouds of dust rising at times as they rode over some dry and sterile piece of ground.

The young braves who guarded them, in spite of the nature of the fight, stood stolid and calm at the posts assigned them in front of the girls, for the rear was a wall of solid rock, and it seemed as if to them it mattered not how the fight went so far as the expression of their faces spoke.

Lottie would have questioned them if she could, for she thought that their experienced eyes could tell which side was so far victorious, but she could not speak their language.

Suddenly one of the young braves turned, and his face showed anxiety. He seemed to have heard some alarm, or to have seen something more attractive than the fight, for his eyes ranged back among the rocks in their rear.

Almost at the same second a sharp volley from unseen riflemen came rattling from the rear, and the four braves lay stretched out dead, while a band of white men, only six in number, with bad, repulsive faces, came rushing

forward from among the rocks where the beautiful stream came trickling from above.

"Gals! White gals, and beauties, my boys!" shouted the leading man, as he sprang forward.

CHAPTER XLII.

ANOTHER TRUCE.

"The trail is hot now!" cried Buffalo Bill, as the sight of the distant plains met his eye once more, and he saw the stones yet damp where the water had dripped from the Indian horses as they crossed and emerged from a brook. "We'll soon have the rascals before us, and then we'll have the girls."

"There's something else that is hot. Look down there!" said Texas Jack, who was ahead, and had halted on the crest of a steep descent.

He pointed to the valley, where all who were up could now see that a terrible Indian fight was going on.

"Good! good! It is dog eat dog now!" cried Buffalo Bill, in high glee. "We'll let them fight it out, and then we'll take down the winners."

"But the girls—where are they?" asked Overton, anxiously.

"Hid away most likely, while the fight is going on. They're not there, that I can see."

He had been looking over the ground through his field-glass.

"If we had any men that we could spare, I'd like to take a hand in that fight," said Buffalo Bill, a little later. "Our old friends that we smoked the peace-pipe with are in the muss."

"What! those Snake Indians?" asked Overton.

"Yes; and they're getting the worst of it too; but that is not our lookout. The Utes have got the girls—that we know, and they've most likely hidden them up in the hills somewhere, under guard."

"Let's look for them!" said Overton, eagerly.

"Not till we know how the fight goes; then we can be ready to play our own hand," said Buffalo Bill, quietly.

"Look back, boss, and tell me what that means?" cried Texas Jack, whose eye, ever wandering about, had caught sight of several columns of smoke rising away to the north.

"It's a conundrum to me," said the scout. "It may be Indian signals, or smoke made by the white ruffians which Steve Hathaway told us about."

"Smoke to tell that Red Leaf has got horses, maybe," said the Sioux chief.

"That is the most likely thing," said Buffalo Bill, and he again began to watch the fight below.

"Them Snakes fight well, but they'll be whipped out clean," he said, after a while. "The Utes are too many for them, and they're fighting bitter. There'll be crow-meat for a month to come down there."

"Serves 'em right—they've no business to be Injuns," said Texas Jack, quietly.

"Ha! Look up there! Ah! they're gone!" cried Overton, pointing to a cliff far over on the right of the party, fully two miles away.

"What's gone? Your senses?" asked Buffalo Bill, noticing how wild the New Yorker gazed where the scout could see nothing but a bleak, bare rock.

"No, no—the women! I saw two women, plain, over there on that rock, and it seemed as if a party of men were hurrying on with them," said Overton.

"You must have been mistaken, or some one else would have seen them, too," said Buffalo Bill. "They could not have got out of sight so soon, either, for you see there is neither bush nor tree on the cliff."

"I did see them, and they disappeared so quick that it looked as if they sunk right down out of sight," said Overton.

"I've had just such visions," said Bill, laughing, "and it was when I was in love, too."

"It was no vision—it was real," persisted Overton.

"Well, after the fight is over down here we'll see if we can find tracks there," said the scout.

Then, his face all aglow with pleasure, he shouted: "There's news coming now. Here come the hunter-scouts back."

He spoke truly. The men who had communicated with Steve Hathaway and the troops were hurrying in, having sent up signal smokes to hurry the troops forward.

Their report decided Buffalo Bill to remain where he was until the cavalry got up, but to satisfy Mr. Overton, he consented he should take a couple of fresh men and go over to the cliff to see if he could find any tracks where he said that he had seen the two women. Norfolk Ben, however, having volunteered, Overton said that he would take him and let the scouts remain.

As Buffalo Bill had no thought that there was any one where Overton said he had seen people, the scout made no objection to the change, for he did not think that Overton was really rushing into a deadly danger, or he would never have let him go from his sight.

But his attention was soon drawn away from Indians and everything else by the sight of the carbines and sabers of cavalymen glittering in the pass to the north, and he rode up to meet and greet Captain Meinhold and Lieutenant Lawson, and to take Steve Hathaway by the hand and to tell him he had done nobly and well.

"I did my level best, mate!" said Steve. "For I had a life to pay for. Now that I've done it, I suppose I'll be no more use."

"Yes—Steve, yes, you will. Henceforward you ride with me, mess with me, and fight alongside of me, if it suits you. If it don't, anything I can do I will do. All you've got to do is to say what you want."

"Thank you, Bill—I'm not deservin' of much in the way of kindness, but we'll see how things work as we go on. Has there been much of a fight down there?"

"I reckon there has, and it isn't over yet, but if they keep on a while there'll not be much left but heads and tails."

"What are they?"

"Snakes and Utes, and they're both just fit to fight each other. Captain Meinhold, you'd better let your command rest and feed till it is over down there, then we can sail in and finish the job. I see the Utes are getting the upper hand, and it is them I want to settle with. We've traced the two captives we wish to rescue to their trail, and they must deliver them up or we'll have hair."

The captain was but too glad of a chance to rest his men and horses, and the necessary orders were given, while he and his lieutenant through the field-glasses watched the fight which yet went on below.

The Snakes were fast becoming disheartened, for their foes were not only nearly double in number, but better armed and better disciplined. The Utes fought as if they had been instructed by some better intelligence than the red man usually has to give.

And, as the others fell, or turning began to give way, the Utes redoubled their efforts, and in a little time it seemed to the gallant officers who looked on, little less than a massacre.

"I am not in the habit of asking or taking advice from any one but ranking superiors, and they generally give it without the asking!" said the captain, turning to where Texas Jack and Buffalo Bill stood engaged like them in watching the issue of the battle. "But it does seem to me as if it would be a mercy to interfere now."

"A mercy to them but not to ourselves, captain," said Buffalo Bill. "The Utes are very strong yet. Every one who falls strengthens us, and the Snakes, with no quarter shown or expected, will drop over a good many yet."

"Yes, sir, and the Utes, hot now, wouldn't stop if they could, and they couldn't if they would, for they're like tigers that are hot with the taste of blood—they're blind!" said Texas Jack. "They'd pitch for us in a minute, without they had a little time to cool off on."

"Well, we will have our horses in hand and ready," said the brave captain. "One thing is sure—it cannot last much longer."

He was right, the Snakes were almost all slain and the few remaining ones were completely disheartened, and only resisted that they might die with weapons in their hands.

The most disinterested persons, to all outward appearance, watching this fight, were Red Leaf and his braves.

Only Kionee noticed it closely, and he was almost critical in his observations.

"Good! That warrior a heap strong!" he cried, as he saw a Snake Indian, evidently a chief, dismounted, fighting hand to hand with five or six of the enemy, and only falling when struck from behind after he had slain three of his enemies in the hand-to-hand struggle.

It was the last of Red Lightning, and soon after he fell the last Snake warrior sullenly drove his own knife home in his heart rather than to let a Ute do it.

Then the yell of victory rose louder than ever from the mouths of the Utes.

But suddenly these were hushed.

For Marmora and his warriors—Egaro was slain—saw the troops drawn up in line on the hill, their arms glittering in the noonday sun, the scouts and Sioux Indians on either flank, and it looked as if another battle was to be fought; fresh and well-armed soldiers against warriors who were tired with a long and bloody fight.

"Now, captain, is the time to wipe them out!" cried Texas Jack, ready to dash forward as he liked to do, with his unerring rifle in hand.

"I'd like to see if we can't get them to give up the girls without a fight first," said Buffalo Bill. "If they saw that there was no chance they would kill them sure."

"My orders are to save the captives if it be possible, for their father is at the fort, recovering from his wounds," said Captain Meinhold.

"They must be saved. Please let me try a talk, captain," urged Buffalo Bill.

"Certainly, try it first, by all means. We have actually no right to attack until they make hostile demonstrations."

Texas Jack looked bewildered. The idea that white men had not a right to attack Indians anywhere and everywhere had never been taught him in his early days, and it came strange now.

But when he saw Buffalo Bill borrow a spear from Red Leaf and put a white handkerchief on the end of it, he realized that there would be a talk here before a fight would come—or an attempt to get it at least.

The arrangements were soon made. Buffalo Bill, with the truce-flag, dashed boldly down the hill, followed more slowly by Captain Meinhold and Texas Jack, the lieutenant holding the company ready to charge if a sign of treachery on the part of the Indians demanded it.

The Utes, at first astounded by this unexpected demonstration in their rear, now were seen to gather for consultation, and when Buffalo Bill was well down the hill toward them three of them were seen to ride out from the rest.

The first was Marmora himself, and a little in his rear, on his right and left, rode a Ute brave.

The one to his right carried a rather dirty-looking white flag.

Buffalo Bill planted the spear with his white flag upon it in the sand, and sat motionless on his horse close by, until the Ute brave, leaving his chief behind, dashed forward and planted their flag by the first.

Then, seeing that Buffalo Bill neither dismounted nor disarmed the Ute chief rode forward, armed and blood-stained from the recent battle.

"I have not come to smoke a peace-pipe, but to talk," said Buffalo Bill. "If the talk of the Ute is good, then we may smoke the peace pipe. If not the soldiers and the scouts are ready for the battle. They are many, and there are more behind to come."

"What has the pale-face to say to Marmora, King of the Wasatch?"

"The Wasatch? If you belong away over there in Utah, what are you doing this side of the great mountains?"

"That is the business of Marmora—not of the pale-face. Marmora is like the wind, he goes wherever his spirit wills. What is the talk of the pale-face?"

"My chief will speak it," said Buffalo Bill, as Captain Meinhold and Texas Jack rode up, thus making the conferring powers equal, at least in numbers.

"Where are the two white captives—young women, who were in your possession?" asked the captain, sternly.

The chief glanced off quickly toward the base of the cliff, where Overton had declared he saw the women, and a look of pleasure lighted his face, for till now he supposed that the girls had been recaptured.

"Why does the pale-face chief ask?" he said, now ready for prevarication, or anything else to gain time, for he believed his braves left in charge of them had been crafty enough to retreat with them.

"Because he has a right. The father of these girls mourns for them in his lodge far away. And they must go back to him—safe and well, or not a red man shall live to say he has seen them. He has seen them. I speak straight and plain. Where are they? I want them!"

"Marmora is a great chief—he is King of the Wasatch."

"Marmora, if that is your name, will be a head less in height very soon if he does not give me a straight answer. Where are the girls?" cried the captain, angrily. "Speak—or I tear down that flag, and my troops will ride you down."

"Marmora, before the battle, sent them away out of danger," said the chief, glancing toward the spot where they had been left.

"Alone?" asked Buffalo Bill, who had detected the look.

"No; with four braves to guard them from hurt."

"Jack, ride over to yon cliff. Call a half-dozen men as you go!" cried Buffalo Bill, nervously. "Mr. Overton said that he saw women there, and I didn't believe him. He went with only Norfolk Ben in company, and they two know nothing about Indians. Go quick, for I feel uneasy."

"You left the girls with four braves. Can you not now call them in?"

"If I do what will the pale-face chief give for the girls whom we caputred from the Cheyennes. They are mine by a red man's right. I took them from the red men, not from the pale-faces."

"I will give you cold steel and blue lead, and plenty of it, if you do not give them up, and I shall waste but little time in talk!" said the captain. "Talking is not my profession. I had rather fight."

"The pale-face has seen that the Utes can fight," said Marmora, proudly.

Then he glanced uneasily off toward the hill, whither Texas Jack and a half-dozen scouts were galloping.

"You will soon feel what my soldiers can do if those girls are not forthcoming," said the captain. "I am in no mood to trifle. I do not ride so far for nothing."

Marmora saw with alarm that the cavalry, evidently impatient, were remounting their horses.

"We will talk!" he said. "We do not want to fight you pale-faces. You have good guns that shoot a great many times, and we do not want to lose many men for two women. You may take them."

"Then send one of your braves back with orders for your people to stay where they are, and go with us up to get the girls. My people shall not move unless yours do."

Marmora had a struggle with his pride to do this, but he knew what well-armed white troops could do, so he sent a warrior back, and leaving the truce-flags flying between the forces he rode on toward the cliff with the captain and Buffalo Bill.

Texas Jack and his men were there, seeking rapidly from rock to rock the marks which might lead to the discovery of the girls. Four dead Indians, unscalped, pierced by rifle balls, lay on the ground.

These were seen when Captain Meinhold, Buffalo Bill, and the Ute chief rode up.

"Who has killed these braves? They were the guards I left with the women," said Marmora.

"Overton and Ben must have done it," said Buffalo Bill.

"Were not they at our lines?"

He asked the last question of Texas Jack.

"No. The last seen of them was on that cliff, after they got your permission to ride over here in search."

"These men are cold. They have been dead a good while. They were killed before we came near the ground," added Texas Jack.

Marmora, whose looks spoke his indignation, said:

"The pale-faces speak with a double tongue. My braves have been killed with big bullets such as the pale-faces use, for lead does not cost them so much as it does the red man. They ask me for the girls after they have killed their guards and taken them."

"It is not so," said Captain Meinhold. "Your braves were not killed by our men; neither have any of us seen or had possession of the girls."

"It looks very dark; I cannot see the way clear," said Marmora. "My braves are killed by white men, who do not take scalps; the women are gone—who did it?"

Buffalo Bill, who had joined Texas Jack in the search, now cried out:

"There have been men here who don't belong to our crowd—white men, too. They wore moccasins, and all my crowd wear boots—so do the soldiers of the captain. Those men came down the hill in the water, and hid where they stood when they shot the braves from behind the rocks. Their tracks tell the story."

"Where, then, is Mr. Overton and the negro you spoke of?" cried the captain.

"They must be on the trail of the men who carried off the girls, for beyond here I see no tracks of the girls," said Texas Jack.

"To the top of the cliff, some of you, quick. There is where Overton said he saw them!" cried Buffalo Bill. "If I had believed it he should not have gone alone."

"Texas Jack and his scouts, by different routes, hurried to reach the indicated spot."

Those who followed the bed of the little stream were there first. Texas Jack was not among these, but he was not far behind the rest.

His report was quickly made. In one spot, where dry sand had blown into a gully there were the tracks of the girls, of men in moccasins, and over these the small, slender boot-mark made by Overton, and the broader track of Ben's brogan.

Just beyond this strip of sand there was a sudden descent—a kind of channel between two cliffs—and then the tracks were lost, for it was hard, solid rock in every direction for quite a long distance.

"The girls have been taken by white miscreants who killed their guards," said Buffalo Bill, who went up himself and examined the tracks.

"Then they must be followed. But it is singular that Mr. Overton and the man who went with him have not returned. Surely he would not be so rash as to follow on the trail alone?" said Captain Meinhold, who had now come up with Marmora.

"There is no trail here to find," said Texas Jack. "If he has followed them he has either seen them or gone on a blind."

"We've got to find out. I wouldn't have him hurt for ten times his weight in gold!" cried Buffalo Bill. "Captain, you can settle the truce with the Ute chief, I reckon. I want to hunt up Mr. Overton and those girls?"

"There is nothing to settle," said Marmora, gravely. "I have had a big fight, and have killed many men. I have lost a great many men. My brother is among them. I don't want to lose any more. The pale-faces can go their way in peace, and I will go mine in the same way, if they will let me."

"We have no war with you," said Captain Meinhold. "Only when the red man raises the hatchet to strike us do we strike back."

"It is well. Marmora will go to bury his dead, and then he will go back over the mountains, for there will be great mourning in all his villages. But we have many scalps to carry back."

The chief rode away, and then Captain Meinhold joined Buffalo Bill again.

The latter had just returned from an unavailing search for the trail of Mr. Overton and the others, but Texas Jack and his scouts were still looking for it.

"I'm afraid Mr. Overton has met bad luck or we should see or hear from him," said Buffalo Bill. "Brave and rash, he has hurried on, and perhaps been shot down by the wretches who have now got those unfortunate girls. I dread to keep on looking, lest I should find his body."

A shout from Texas Jack, who was seen hurrying back, told them that he had news of some kind for them.

"I've found where they took their horses," he said.

"There is a pretty strong party, for some staid back."

"Have you seen any sign of Mr. Overton?" asked Buffalo Bill, eagerly.

"Yes; he and Norfolk Ben have been taken and carried along. Their tracks are plain where the horses were kept."

"It is strange they were not killed on the spot. But we

must take the trail at once—that is if Captain Meinhold will do it."

"Of course," said the brave officer. "I came to get you out of a scrape, if you were in it, and I shall see you through."

"Thank you, captain; I shall never forget you. I'm not one of the forgetting kind anyway."

"So your enemies say," said Texas Jack. "But, boss, we're losing time. Suppose I take the scouts and put right along? I don't believe there's more than we can handle."

"I'll join you with Red Leaf and his braves, and then the captain can come along more at leisure," said Buffalo Bill.

"We'll all try to keep together," said the captain. "They cannot have much start, and we surely can overtake them."

"Some of us can," said Buffalo Bill, "or there is one that'll break his neck trying. If Overton is lost or killed I'll never show my face East again."

The captain now sent back orders for the troops to ride around where the trail could be taken, and then went with Buffalo Bill to the point, guided by Texas Jack.

Sure enough there were tracks where a large band of horses had stood for some time, for the ground was all trodden up, and then, on the thus softened ground, the tracks of men could be seen.

Among these the keen eye of Buffalo Bill soon detected the boot-marks made by Overton, the brogan-tracks of Ben, and in one place the tiny impression of the girls' feet.

"We are on the trail of all of 'em now, sure," he said, when he made the last discovery.

By the time all the horses had been brought up from where they were left at the foot of the cliff, the troop, with the rest of the scouts and the Indians of Red Leaf, were there.

Steve Hathaway came with them.

When he saw the tracks he shook his head.

"Mate," said he, "you might as well count your friend and the darky dead and the gals worse off. The worst lot of the Hill thieves have got 'em. Bill Harkness has been here. Do you see that big track? His foot is the biggest in the gang."

"I'll soon have the measure of it," said Buffalo Bill, springing upon his horse.

"Be a little easy, mate, and you, too, captain, and listen to me, for I may help you now more than you dream. These chaps are strong and have big backin', and they can lay for you in a dozen places betwixt here and Nick's Cavern, where they quarter."

"Let 'm lay, Steve. We'll lay them out," said Buffalo Bill, spurring on.

"I can't see him ride right into the jaws of death. I saved him once, and I'll save him again," cried Hathaway, and he rode on at a gallop to join Buffalo Bill at the head of the column.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A FAMILIAR VOICE.

So sure was Overton that he had seen the girls that he was determined to satisfy himself on the point, and he never dreamed or even took time to think of the danger which might confront him in the attempt.

The route which he and his volunteer aid, Norfolk Ben, took to reach the top of the cliff did not lead them by the bodies of the Ute braves, or the New Yorker might have got a shadow of the peril he was walking into so blindly.

They rode to where the ridge seemed most accessible on horseback and attempted to ride up, but they found it too steep for the horses and hurried up on foot.

They soon reached the crest of the cliff, and not seeing any one there, Overton went on a little way and shouted. For he thought if the girls were near they would answer. He thought he heard an answering cry a little way on, and pushed forward.

"Marse Oberton, I wouldn't go dar out o' sight ob de odders," said the thoughtful Ben. "I 'clar to goodness I wouldn't. You dunno what dere is among dem rocks. Maybe pant'ers, maybe wolves."

There were wolves, but they were in human shape, and Overton soon found them, as he hurried on despite Ben's entreaties, followed, however, by the faithful fellow, who was willing to share the danger if he could not get Mr. Overton to shun it.

Just where a small chasm opened between the rocks, and Overton stepped in to see if there was any sign of the girls there, he was confronted by a half-dozen men with leveled guns, while Ben cried out from behind.

"Look out, Marse Oberton, dere's men wid shootin' irons ahind us."

Sure enough, they were surrounded, and a man gigantic in stature, with all but nose and eyes hidden in a black, bushy beard, cried out:

"Stranger—you've put your foot into a trap. If you've got any prayin' to do—do it quick and then shell out. I see you wear a watch and diamonds. We'll take them first and your life afterward."

"It might pay you better to let the life stay where it is," said Overton, growing suddenly calm, though he was at first badly startled.

"I can't see it. Boys, knock that nigger in the head—he isn't any good, standin' there."

"Don't, Marse Whiteman—don't. You'll spoil dat gun if you do."

Ben's expostulation, his look, or his words, spoken as a man raised the butt of his rifle to strike him down, created such a laugh that the man couldn't strike.

"An' it's no use a killin' such a good cook an' servant as I is. 'Fore de war I'd have brung a heap o' money—you bet, I would."

Another laugh showed that Ben's appeal had put their captors in something like a better humor, or else the rich spoil taken from Overton had done it.

For the man who seemed to lead or command had found a full set of diamond shirt studs, a cluster diamond ring, a magnificent watch, and a wallet full of greenbacks, besides a check on some Nebraska bank for more when needed.

"Fat—the chap is fat!" said the leader, as he shook the plunder gleefully before his mates.

"Maybe he has got more that could be reached. Let's keep him till we see," said one of the men.

"Well—I'm agreed," said the first. "We can make use of the nigger anyway when we get to the cave. He says he can cook."

"I jess kin dat, Marse Whiteman!"

"Well, move on—move on. We've not long to stay around here, for some of your gang may be on our trail."

The next instant a cry of surprise left the lips of Mr. Overton, and one of real joy broke from Ben.

Two young girls, very pale, but even with tangled hair and garments covered with dust, very beautiful, stood near some horses, guarded by three or four armed men.

"Oh, de goodness! dar's de cherrybims!" cried Ben, breaking away from all restraint and rushing up to the girls, whose hands he seized and kissed, while he actually wept for gladness to find them alive. "Oh, Missee Susie an' Miss Lottie. Jes' to think I'm wid you once more. Ole Ben is jes' ready to go now when Gabriel blows his horn—he is dat. Oh, honeys, is it you—all sure alive?"

"The darky knows you?" said the leader of the band.

"Yes," said Lottie. "He was my father's servant."

"Yes—I is his servant, and yours, too, Miss Lottie. Your old fadder is alive, and he'd jes' gib a hundred tousan' dollar, an' he's got it, too—to see you and Missee Susie once more."

"A hundred thousand dollars—do you know what you are saying, darky?" asked the leader of the band, while the rest talked among themselves.

"Yes, Marse Whiteman—I jes' do know what I'm sayin'. An' her old man has done got it, all in greenbacks to buy and stock his farm out whar he was gwine."

"Where is he now?"

"Back wid de wagons, where he was hurt when dese cherrybims was took from him. He's dar sure, and so is de money, an' I know he'd give it all to see dese 'ere ladies back safe to him."

"Does that negro speak the truth?" asked the leader,

sternly, of Overton.

"I believe he does," said the latter, who had hardly let his eyes move from the face of Lottie all this time. If there is any doubt about Mr. Herbeson, the father of these ladies, having the money, I know who has it, and who will give even that sum to see them restored free and unharmed to him."

"You mean yourself, I suppose?"

"For such a purpose I can command that sum."

"Hum! Why don't you bargain for your own life?"

"Because I would rather buy their safety than my own. I am young, single, and—not afraid of death."

"Well, you take things pretty cool. The things you wear prove you are rich. What do you say, boys—shall we take 'em all on to the cave and hold 'em to ransom? We can make more by that than we can lookin' for horses."

"Ay—ay—take 'em to the cave," cried the rest.

"And hurry up. There's a big lot of men down below the cliff, and they aren't in that Indian fight," said a man who came up at that moment.

"Mount at once—we were lucky to have spare horses," said the leader. "Mount and away."

Then turning to Mr. Overton he said:

"Stranger—if you'll act square we'll treat you well. If you don't you'll die without havin' time to pray."

"Treat them well, and you shall have every dollar I have in the world," said Overton, glancing at the girls.

"They shall be treated well if we're sure of being paid well," said the other.

Now they were all mounted, and moving off up among the rugged hills at a sweeping trot increased to a gallop where the route was better.

Overton now had a chance to look at the party, for he and the girls were placed in the center. Ben following close behind.

There seemed to be in all about twenty-five or thirty men, all well armed, but wearing a wicked, wild look, such as might be expected in bad, outlawed men.

They rode very good horses, and rode as if they were used to the saddle.

For a time they thus kept on in silence, the route being through a wild and picturesque country, which Overton would have admired under any other circumstances.

But now he had got to thinking what Buffalo Bill would do when he missed him. Would he discover the trail? And if he did would not the very fact of his following it up be fatal to the hopes if not to the lives of the captives?

He thought that he would explain this to the leader and get his permission to ride back and keep Bill from following until the ransom matter was negotiated. But the thought of leaving those girls for an instant with such men deterred him.

He was pondering what to do when one of the rear guard thundered by him and rode to the front. After he spoke to the leader the pace was increased to a swift gallop, and then the leader dropped back alongside of Overton.

"Young man," said he, "I've a few questions to ask, and if you don't answer them straight we'll not bother about that ransom. What party were you with when you happened to fall into our trail?"

"A party of scouts commanded by Buffalo Bill, the great hunter, and some Sioux Indians, eighteen or twenty, under a chief they called Red Leaf."

"Were there no troops—cavalry—in the party?"

"None when I left; but they were expecting some up that had been sent for—expecting them every hour," replied Overton.

"Young man, I am satisfied that you have told the truth, and now I'll tell you some news. These scouts, Indians, and cavalry men are on our trail; and you need not think it'll help your case much, for I'd drop you, Indian fashion, with a bullet, before I'd lose you. You'll see them the worst whipped crowd in about half an hour that you ever heard of. We'll be then where their cavalry will have as much play as a horse in a hencoop. So keep cool, remain quiet, without an effort to escape, and you and the girls are safe. Remember—a sign that looks like getting away draws lead for your heart."

Overton knew that every word the man spoke was

meant, and that an attempt to escape would be literally hopeless, and only draw death to him and those whom he looked upon with so much pity.

Overton wanted to ask Lottie if she did not write the letter which, hidden in an inside vest-pocket, directly over his heart, had escaped the search of the robbers, but he dared not. He only hoped it was she, for her face had gone right into his heart and made a picture there.

The full speed of the horses was kept up now for several miles, and they seemed to have left pursuit behind, when they suddenly rode into a gorge so deep and dark that it seemed like twilight when they got in.

The leader here checked the speed a little, and Overton looked up, almost awe-stricken by the sight which met his eyes.

Great rocks, red as if burned with volcanic fire, hung from either side, almost over their heads, showing but a narrow strip of sky, as he looked far, far up the dark chasm.

And narrower yet seemed the pass as they kept on, until suddenly they came to where only one could ride in file, and here the leader halted, and made the rest pass on. Overton saw the girls go just before him, and then he followed, just as a rifle-shot and a loud, ringing shout reached his ears.

Only too well did he know the ring of the "long-range rifle" and the sound of Buffalo Bill's voice.

CHAPTER XLIV.

NICK'S CAVERN.

Overton glanced back as he heard the sounds detailed in our last chapter, the rifle-shot and battle-shout of Buffalo Bill, and he saw the last man of the party, who rode just to the rear of where the leader sat in his saddle, reel and fall from his horse.

At the same instant he saw the leader spur on into the narrow pass, bringing up the rear, while he by some contrivance, which Overton did not understand, detached a huge mass of rock, which completely blocked up the road, so that pursuit till this was cleared away was hopeless.

Not being able to stop, had he even desired to do it, Overton had to keep with the rest a little farther, and then he found himself in what he had heard so much about—the far-famed "Nick's Cavern."

It was an immense cleft, or yawning mouth, beneath the mountain side, which seemed to have been hollowed out by a river of fire, so red, lava-like were the curious and fantastic walls. The main cave was large enough for a regiment to have maneuvered in handsomely, while away off into the mountain ran dark halls and avenues—how far none but those who were used to their secrets knew.

But Overton had no time to see more than that already there was quite a large party of men there, and that there were fires burning, which had not only served to light the vast palace, but gave several men and women its uses in cooking, washing, etc.

A thundering cheer greeted the arrival of the leader, whom Mr. Overton now heard addressed as Bill Harkness.

His answer was a shrill whistle-call, which brought every man from inside to where he was seated.

"Men!" he shouted, "we've been followed close by scouts, Indians, and cavalry. I've dropped the cliff-rock in their path, but if they're spunky, as I think they are, they'll try to get us out of here. I've left a dozen men at the pass—the next thing to do is to fill the range above with our best shots and clean them out. So up and away, about forty of you, and take care of things there, and make your visitors too sick to stay. As soon as I and my crowd have had a bite to eat I'll go up and look to things myself."

The only reply was a general cheer, and Overton saw the men, all armed, scattering away to obey orders.

"Whom have you here, Bill?" asked a man who looked all as rough as Harkness, approaching the spot where Overton, the two girls, and Norfolk Ben were standing.

"Prisoners, to be well treated for the present, without they try to get away."

Overton made up his mind to remain near the girls all

the time, and if an unkind hand was laid upon them, or any open violence offered, he would die in their defense or help them.

For the longer he looked at Lottie the more he liked her, and he now had a chance to say a few words of comfort to her and her sister. The ruffian, Harkness, did not seem to like this, for, calling a stout, red-faced woman to him, he said:

"Here, Lize, you take them two gals to your corner here, and keep 'em under your own eye. Feed 'em well, and treat 'em well, but don't let any man talk to or bother 'em. Mind, now, and do as I say. Hold on—that nigger there has been their servant and cook. He can wait on them and help you."

Thank you, Marse Whiteman. De old lady'll jes' find me handy."

"Who do you call old, you moke," cried Lize, angrily.

"Beg pardon, misses—I hadn't looked at you afore. I clear to goodness you is younger an' han'somer dan any lady I done see ebber since we left San Lewis."

"That'll do," said Lize, completely mollified. "There's dishes to wash—tend to that and then get something to eat for the young ladies."

Ben, only too glad to be near Susie and Lottie, went right to work, while Bill Harkness beckoned Overton to him.

"Stranger," said he, "make yourself comfortable here nigh this fire. After I've attended to them cusses that have followed us, I'll arrange that ransom business. It will take some time, I suppose, for some one of us will have to go for the money, but we'll make you comfortable as long as you keep quiet and take things easy. We'll have something to eat and drink soon, and then you'll have to excuse me. If those friends of yours push for a fight I must accommodate them with that, and all the ground they'll measure when they're straight."

"They're fighting now, are they not?" asked Overton. "I hear guns firing."

"Maybe they're wasting powder—for they couldn't do anything with us here—no, not if they tried for six months. We're valled in from the east, for I had all fixed to tumble forty tons of rock into the trail. I meant to wait a little longer to wall some of them in, but the trap went too easy. West from here there's no opening that isn't guarded, and nothing but an eagle can climb the cliffs on that side. So make your mind easy about them."

Overton could not. For he loved Buffalo Bill as well as he did his own brothers. And he feared, when he saw how impregnable this place was, that the brave scout would lose his life in trying to get to him.

Supper was now set out on a rude table for Overton and Harkness, and a very good meal it was considering the situation.

Overton saw that there was a great deal of dried meat and some fresh game hanging up in the place, and he also saw that here was forage for the horses stacked in the upper end of the cave, where they were tied, to at least the number of two or three hundred.

Water dripped from springs on every side, finding its way off in little trickling streams as bright as silver.

The robber noticed how observantly Overton took in the general features of the place, and there was a world of sarcasm in his tones as he said:

"Study things out all you like, stranger. You'll never have a chance to tell outsiders how we look or live."

Overton looked surprised, and said:

"You promise my release if ransom is paid, do you not?"

"Yes, but not until it is paid. Then before you go from here you'll have to swear by an oath you dare not break, never to expose what you have seen here. We have snug quarters, and we intend to hold them."

"If I gave you my promise to keep secret anything, I should keep it," said Overton.

"Well, you look honest—too honest for this crowd, but for all that we wouldn't trust you or anybody."

Overton was now done eating, and asked if he could smoke.

"Oh, yes—eat, drink, and smoke when you feel like it. If you feel sleepy there are the blankets for you. But mark—no cruising about. If you went over where the

horses are you'd get lead through your carcass. You can go one hundred yards up this avenue here—but no farther than that—if you went to where a light burns beyond that point, you'd be dropped dead in your tracks. We've rules, and they must be obeyed."

"I shall not break them," said Overton. "It seems to me they're firing pretty often outside."

"Yes. I must go and see to it. Your friends are only wasting powder."

As Bill Harkness left the place Overton saw a man brought into the cave, evidently badly wounded.

"That don't look like wasting powder," muttered Overton, careful not to be overheard.

CHAPTER XLV.

FIRING KEPT UP.

It is now time to go outside and see how Buffalo Bill and his crowd get along. When the trail was taken Buffalo Bill in the lead, Steve Hathaway following, the horses of the whole party were put to their full speed. For Buffalo Bill argued that to save the life of Overton and the honor of those helpless girls, they must not give those white ruffians any time to rest or to think.

Steve Hathaway was of this opinion, as far as that went, but he knew the country and the stronghold so well that he told Bill that if the ruffians got to the last safe there would be no use trying to attack them, and no hope to drive them out, except by starvation, and that would be difficult, for they had plenty of provisions.

Disguising himself by throwing away his Indian coat and taking a jacket from a soldier, changing hats with Buffalo Bill, Steve now felt no fear of recognition from the band, and finding no words of his could restrain the scout from charging right on, he rode on with him, showing him short cuts to gain on the others, etc.

Thus it was that Buffalo Bill, in sight just before the band reached Nick's Cavern, got a shot with his long-range rifle which dropped the last ruffian in the crowd dead from his saddle.

Steve, who knew the secret of the trap, and the peril if the rocks were sent tumbling down, dashed his horse forward at its maddest speed, and got the horse of Buffalo Bill by the rein just in time to rear him back on his haunches and save the heroic rider from being crushed by the terrible avalanche which now blocked the way.

Anger flushed the face of the noble scout for an instant when the horse reared, but in the next second, when he saw what a terrible death he had been saved from he turned and said:

"Steve, I owe my life to you a second time. I don't know how I'll ever pay the debt."

"Say no more about it. We're no more than even, mate. The hounds are safe now. They're shut in, and we're shut out."

"Is that trail entirely blocked?"

"Yes, entirely. They are all in Nick's Cavern, where there is enough feed for man and beast kept all the time to last for months. It is shut in every way now."

"Good! Then they can't get out?"

"No, but you can't get in."

"We'll see. They go in, and so will I."

"But they'll get to the top of the cliff over us, and make it too hot for us here."

"Will they? Then we'll make it too hot for them there. If they can shoot at us we can return the fire. If I see a gun flash lead will go very near where I see that flash."

"If you hurt any of them they'll murder the prisoners."

"How are we to know they have not done that already? I tell you what it is, Steve, I've done fooling. I have not come this far to go back with my hands down, leaving them here to crow. They've got to be wiped out."

"It will be a hard old chance."

"Then I'm just in for it. Here comes Captain Meinhold. What shall I tell him?"

"That you've holed your game, but diggin' for it in a rock will be hard work."

"Well, why don't we go on?" asked the captain, who had not been able to hold the wild pace that Bill had kept

for a few miles back.

"Rocks caved in our way, and the enemy caved in behind them," said Buffalo Bill.

"Can you see them?"

"No, sir; but I hear them," said Buffalo Bill, as a bullet flattened against a rock within a foot of his head. "If you'll get under cover, sir, we'll talk with Steve here, and see what we can do."

"I don't like this," said the captain, as they fell back a little where some rocks and trees sheltered them partially, for from away up in the cliff, out of sight of them, a fire was now opened which made it necessary for all hands to take cover."

Two wounded men, a scout and a soldier, proclaimed this necessity.

"Is there no way of getting in and making a charge?" asked the captain. "Hand to hand, saber and revolver, I'll risk meeting them, three to one!"

"Just about the odds, I reckon, captain, but the getting in is the question. There is a passage in and out, besides the one they've filled up, where a man can creep, but not where horses can go. But only Bill Harkness and two more know anything about it. It was always kept from the rest for fear of treachery at a time like this," said Hathaway.

"It can and must be found," said Buffalo Bill. "I'm going to look for it."

The brave scout handed his rifle to Steve.

"Take care of Lucretia," said he. "If I don't get in there I sha'n't need her any more. If I do I'll make music with her when they're on the run among the hills."

Buffalo Bill started out, determined to climb the cliff.

But the instant he was seen near the face of the rock bullets "rained" at him. That Providence, which seems ever to shelter and protect the bravest, when cowards fall, must have shielded his breast, for he was evidently a target for at least twenty marksmen.

Coolly he dropped back.

"Climbin' just now, in the face of a leaden hail-storm, isn't in my line. But I've got the dot on one fellow. I'll take Lucretia again, Steve."

Hathaway handed over his rifle to Bill.

The latter went on to tell Steve that he had seen one gun flash from the limb of a pine which almost overhung the spot where they had first stood.

"I'm going to creep for him," said Bill. "If I can get him between me and the sky he'll be dead meat after Lucretia sings her song."

The scout crept from rock to rock under the bushes for some little time, while the scouts and soldiers kept the men above occupied, for the former fired every time they saw a gun flash.

But this shooting was entirely at random, and there was no certainty of their hitting a man.

But when the rifle which Buffalo Bill had affectionately named Lucretia was heard to crack at last almost simultaneously with the report came a shriek of agony.

"Buffalo Bill first, last, and forever," shouted Texas Jack. "Did you hear that wild-cat howl? He'll not den in them rocks any more. I reckon he's gone up."

"No—he came down like Captain Scott's coon!" said Bill, who now crept back. "I let him down out of that tree nice. But he fell on the bank above. I was in hopes he'd drop over."

The firing was still kept up, though it was now quite dark, but apparently to no effect, but to show that powder was plenty on both sides.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PRICE OF TREACHERY.

After Bill Harkness left Overton to go up where the firing was now kept up pretty regularly, the latter thought he would look around as far as the bounds named by Harkness would allow.

So, after taking a long, earnest look at Lottie, who sat with Susie near the fire, listening to some droll talk from Ben which kept Lize roaring with laughter, the New Yorker strolled back toward the avenue or chamber which

he was told he could use for a promenade of a hundred yards, if he liked.

It was simply lighted by the distant fire and torches, but the floor was level, so he walked on and thought.

Thought about home, his good mother, his dear brothers, and the fair sisters who might never see him more, and then working back where he could see Lottie, with the firelight at play upon her beautiful face, he thought he would risk life and all its chances on getting her out of the hands of these ruffians, if there was but half a chance.

Suddenly he became aware that he was approaching a man, and thinking it might be the sentinel who stood at the death-line, he began to retrograde.

"Halt! Come here, I want to talk with you," said the man, whatever he was, seen indistinctly in the gloom.

Overton recognized the voice. It was that of the man who had spoken to Harkness, asking who his prisoners were, and what he intended to do with them, as detailed in former pages.

So he made up his mind quickly, as he knew this man was well armed, that it would be folly not to accept his invitation to advance.

He did advance until he was close to the man, who said then, in a low tone:

"Stop—you're near enough. Speak low and answer my questions."

Overton halted, for he heard the click of a pistol as it was cocked. He thought it was rather unnecessary, since he was unarmed, but he made no comments.

"Bill Harkness means to hold you to ransom, don't he?" said the man.

"I think I heard him tell you so," said Overton.

"Ah, you've sharp eyes in the dark. I didn't think you'd know me. But it doesn't make any odds. How much are you going to give him?"

Overton hesitated. He did not know if it were prudent to tell this man; if Harkness knew it, it might make him a bitter enemy.

"Come, speak out. It maybe the best thing you ever did for yourself. You needn't fear my telling. I want to know for my own satisfaction, and because"—the stranger spoke in a whisper now—"it might better your bargain."

Overton did not hesitate now. He felt in a moment that there was a man before him whose treachery might be bought.

"One hundred thousand dollars," said Overton, promptly, "for the freedom of those two girls, myself, and the negro, Ben."

"Whew! Bill lied to me. You've got the spots, sure?"

"If you mean the money, yes, where, for this purpose, I can command it."

"You could have it paid into a man's hand, in the border settlements, wherever he named and you went, quiet, so nobody but him would be the wiser?"

"Yes, I have no doubt of it."

"Stranger, I can do you a turn, and I can do it twenty-five thousand cheaper than he. I can get you out of here, and the gals, too, for I know a secret passage. There's only Bill, and me, and one other man, knows of it, and that other man is about past knowing anything, for 'twas him they brought in dying just now. He is shot through the throat, and he can't speak."

"Can I trust you?" asked Overton, eagerly.

"You've got to; you can't help yourself. And I've got to trust you, too, for the cap told me he cleaned you out of all you had on you. But I looked in your eye out there by the fire, and there isn't any lie in it."

"Thank you!"

"I'm not talkin' for thanks; I'm talkin' for money. I'm sick of this kind o' life. I haven't been treated fair any way. They made me cap'n, and then broke me because I wouldn't go down to the railroad and run trains off. But that isn't business. Swear that if I'll get you clear you'll give me seventy-five thousand good money."

"I will, on my sacred honor, and by my soul!"

"Well, I s'pose that is as good as an oath. The next thing is the plan to get you out."

"You understand, the girls, and the man Ben, are in the bargain."

"Yes, and there's the trouble. I could get you off from

here in twenty minutes. But that Lize is as sharp as a ferret. Bill knew what he was about when he told her to look out for 'em."

"I will not move without them."

"There's but one other way, and I hate to do that. But there isn't one in a hundred of them that wouldn't if they had the chance."

"Wouldn't do what?" asked Overton.

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. If 'twas known we were talking here, and about this we'd be burned alive. What I was thinking of was the letting of your friends in here. If I did our fellows would have to git, or go under. And then you and the girls would be safe enough, so safe that if you wanted to go back on me I might whistle for my money."

"I have sworn that if you help me and the other three away you shall have it."

"I might get killed, as I surely would, if Bill Harkness could get one sight of me, and then I'd be where money wouldn't do me any good. I want to get out in the world, live honest once more, and I can't do that without

not go out, have an interview with Buffalo Bill, see him how to get in, and then stay where you will be safe?" urged Overton.

"I'd be as safe here as there, if the party was in, and safer, too. It'll never do for Bill Harkness to know, while he lives, that I've done this. He must be snuffed out first thing. Have you anything to write with?"

"Yes, a pencil and memorandum-book."

"Then write a note to Buffalo Bill, telling him what I will do and what he can do. I'll get it to him. After that you go and sit down where he told you to sleep, keep cool, and be ready to help yourself when others are ready to help you. Here is a revolver. Keep it out of sight till you need it."

"I will," said Overton, rejoiced once more to have a weapon in his hand.

"And be quiet. Don't let Harkness, should he come down from above, see that you've got a bit of hope. He is keen, and if he suspects anything the whole job is gone up for he could block the secret passage just as easy as he can pass out there."

"I'm not afraid for my betrayal, by look or word. I will be fast asleep, should you return, but wide awake enough to do any duty which comes up."

"All right. Trust me now, as I trust you."

The man took the hasty note which Overton wrote to Buffalo Bill, and in another second he was out of sight.

Overton, placing the treasured revolver in his bosom, now went back to the place where a heap of blankets had been pointed out by Harkness as his sleeping place.

Here he sat down, and drawing his hat well over his brows, watched as calmly as he could, the faces of those sweet girls, the comic looks of Ben, and the mingled expressions that came and went on the face of the creature Lize, for it would be an insult to the sex to call her woman.

And he waited—for what he could hardly tell. If the man—whose name even he did not know, for it was so unimportant he had not asked it—was faithful to his promise, in a little while his friends would be there, able and willing to rescue and protect those who had suddenly become objects of his dearest interest. He had not spoken an angry word to Lottie, and never a word to Lize, yet his whole heart had gone out to her, and he would rather die with her there than to live and leave her behind.

He—who had ever been termed by the fair ones in his own city so cold that beauty could not captivate or love soften the ice of his nature—was now in love in the fullest sense, and it had all commenced in the "beautiful handwriting" of the note picked up days before.

A noise from men advancing attracted the attention of Overton now, and he turned, to see Bill Harkness coming leaning on the arm of one of his men.

"Hit, stranger, and have lost a little blood, but not bad, only a flesh-wound. I staid too long to see to," said the robber, as he sank down on a pile of buffalo robes. Then turning to come with him, he said, "Hunt up Dolph

Lowell, and tell the cuss to go up above and watch them fellows, or some of 'em will climb the cliff. They're the sharpest crowd I've ever had dealin's with. There's one fellow there that shoots the closest I ever knew."

"Texas Jack, I expect, is the man you mean," said Overton. "He is the only man on the plains that can beat Buffalo Bill, and that is enough to say he can beat the world."

"'Twas him that hit me, and I didn't think they could see a square inch when I crept up where I could see what they were doing, for they seemed to be holding some kind of a palaver, but I didn't get my head out before a ball raked my shoulder. Jeff Perkins is dead; he got an ounce ball through his neck while he was in a tree. They're wide awake, but when it comes daylight we'll have a fair show; we can pick them off till they're sick of staying around here."

The man who went for Dolph Lowell came back and reported that he couldn't find him.

"The lazy cuss has gone to sleep, I suppose," said Harkness, "or hid away somewhere. Since he couldn't be captain he hasn't wanted to be anything. Go up above yourself, Jake Durn, and look to the boys. After I've had my wound dressed, and taken a nip to bring the life back, I'll try and crawl up again myself. I wish it was daylight; we'd make that crowd sick then in a hurry."

The man called Jake Durn now hurried away and the robber called Lize over to dress his wound.

She did this with a speed and skill that told she was used to such work.

"Hark! What was that?" said the robber. "I heard something clash."

"I saw a horse kicking out over here," said Overton, whose heart throbbed wildly now, for he had recognized the clatter of a saber against the rocks.

The robber appeared to be satisfied, and he called out to Lize to get him a bite to eat.

The woman cut him off a huge slice of venison from a roasted haunch, and was in the act of handing it to him when her eyes, looking back into the gloom, flashed like those of an angry tigress, and she screamed:

"Bill, we're betrayed! Look!—the soldiers!"

"Kill them gals!" shouted Harkness as he sprang to his feet, leveling his pistol at Overton, who, with his revolver out, was on his feet as quick.

Overton, hearing the cry, "kill the girls," had sprung between them and the woman, and Bill Harkness, following his body with his pistol, fired, at the second the woman Lize turned, and his ball, instead of hitting Overton, pierced her body.

In a second, with a terrible cry, Buffalo Bill sprang forward, and as the woman fell, Harkness, turning to meet the onset, received a crushing blow from the knife of the daring scout which sent him reeling to the earth, while the cavern, filled with soldiers, Sioux Indians, and scouts, rang with rapid shots as the robbers came rushing out to defend their stronghold.

"Up above!—up above, and wipe 'em all out, now your hand is in!" cried Steve Hathaway, who knew the route to the top of the cliff.

"Traitor, your place is below!" cried Bill Harkness, raising up with a dying effort, and firing his last shot, for as he saw Steve Hathaway fall he dropped back, with a gurgling death-rattle in his own throat.

"He wasn't the traitor!" yelled the woman Lize, who had crept up to Bill in her dying agony. There he stands!"

And she wrenched the revolver from the hands of the dead man and fired at Dolph Lowell just as he, seeing his danger, leveled a gun at her and fired.

Both shots were sure, and while Overton rushed to the girls to see that they were unharmed he saw the man fall who would have held a seventy-five thousand dollar claim on him.

But it was wiped out now.

Yet the fight was not all over. The men who were above hearing the shouts below rushed down in a body, thinking to take the soldiers from the rear, while they supposed Bill Harkness and others had them in front.

But they reckoned beyond their knowledge.

They were received, as brave Captain Meinhold wanted to receive them, hand to hand, with saber and revolver.

while Red Leaf and his braves, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack—last, but not least—with battle-shout, and whoop, and yell, went through them as the fire goes through dry grass.

It was "Buffalo Bill's last victory," for he led the daring charge, and it was complete.

The robbers, asking no quarter, fought, but they fought without heart, and while few fell on the right side, the bad men were completely "wiped out," to use a phrase so often conveyed in Western parlance.

When the light of another day shone on the earth men were busy clearing out the narrow road that led from the cavern, but all of these men belonged to the command of the brave Meinhold, and were directed in the work by the gallant Lieutenant Lawson.

Overton was now happy. He could talk to rescued Lottie all that he wanted to, and he had found out from her own lips that it was she who wrote the "beautiful hand."

Ben, too, was in what he termed "de sebethen hebben." His young mistresses were free, he had heard that his old master was alive and getting well, and he was out of the hands of bad men.

There was not a great deal of plunder in the place, except in arms and horses, and these were indeed quite a capture.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BILL'S NEWS.

"I wish that Buffalo Bill was back!" said the commanding officer at Fort McPherson. "The report that the Indians are thick between here and the Loup is not agreeable. It seems to me that if they are not checked in time we'll have a general Indian war this summer. The red fiends are getting very bold, and should they make a raid upon the railroad the country would have a shock which would make the Peace Commissioners rather unpopular."

While he was thus speaking to the post-adjutant an old man, pale and feeble, leaning on a staff, approached.

"Ah! Mr. Herbeson, I am glad to see you able to come out. We are looking with hope for the safe return of your daughters, for it is full time the command we sent out reported."

"I have hoped till hope seems a mockery," said the old man. "My sons are dead, and sometimes, when I think what may have happened, I wish almost that I knew my daughters were dead also. Then I could bow my head to His will, and go to my grave conscious that I had nothing to live for."

"Look! look, general!" said the post adjutant. "No man but Buffalo Bill rides like that."

A man, with his long hair flowing out in the sunlight from his bare head, waving a big white hat in his hand, sitting his horse as if he and the animal were one, came like the wind toward headquarters.

At the same moment a cheerful bugle-call came from toward the Platte.

"Company 'B' is coming in!" cried the adjutant.

"What is the news?" cried the general, hastily, as the scout rode up, and before he dismounted.

"Victory, sir—victory over the worst band of robbers the country was ever cursed with; nearly three hundred horses captured; Red Leaf and his band, with Dove Eye, gone back to Spotted Tail's camp satisfied, and—"

"My daughters—you don't say a word about them!" groaned Mr. Herbeson. "Are they dead—or worse?"

"They're alive and well, old gentleman, and as happy as queen bees!" cried the noble scout.

"Quick! Lift him up! The old gentleman has fainted!" cried the general.

He had fainted from sudden and excessive joy, and not till his daughters were there in person to assist, did he fully come back to his senses and to a realization that there was yet happiness in store for him.

By this time the general was receiving the report of Captain Meinhold, who had not only done the country the great and efficient service of breaking up a dangerous band of desperadoes, but had so well managed his com-

mand that it came back efficient in men and horses, and ready for immediate service.

So ready, indeed, that only two days afterward, when a band of Indians came down from the Loup and stole horses from near the fort, Company A, with the brave Meinhold and Lawson in charge, and Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack as scouts and guides, followed them up and taught them such a lesson as has checked horse-stealing in that vicinity ever since.

Before closing I must say that Mr. Herbeson gave up all idea of going to the far West, after he had enjoyed a little private conversation with his daughter Lottie and Mr. Overton, and a bird whispers to me that an engagement-ring is worn upon Lottie's forefinger—that it is a diamond cluster, and as we know Mr. Overton is very fond of diamonds we may infer—well, that this story has come to a very happy

END.

"TOM RICHARDS"

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